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EDITORIAL

CRACKS IN THE TEFLON

Poor President Reagan. His political radar is on the blink and his staff is letting him down. That seems to be the consensus of Washington insiders in the wake of the Bitburg blunder and the *contra* aid defeat, and with Social Security cuts and the ill-conceived Nicaraguan trade embargo coming to center stage. Even those Republicans who used to chant, "Let Reagan be Reagan" are wailing, "Where are Jim Baker and Ed Meese now that we need them?" Why, Baker would have "undone the Bitburg blunder" within twenty-four hours, a senior official told *Washington Post* columnist Lou Cannon.

Things used to be a lot simpler. When Harry Truman made a boo-boo, everyone knew where the buck stopped. But this President has been so swaddled in P.R. that when he stumbles, everyone blames his attendants.

One widely cited problem, along with Mike Deaver's lame-duck status, is that chief of staff Don Regan is a yes man, an executive type who regards his main mission as insuring top-down obedience. Baker knew how to tell the boss no; he was also a damage-control expert.

Another factor is White House communications director Pat Buchanan, an ideologue who believes damage control is for wimps. He told the President that canceling the Bitburg visit would be "caving in," and he was the brain behind the President's remark that S.S. troopers were also "victims of Nazism."

Frankly, we can't decide whether we prefer the old, leashed Reagan or the new, free-running one. But we are beginning to worry that one night Buchanan will rush in with a frothing speech demanding a pre-emptive strike on Moscow. The President will read it, nod excitedly, then turn to the agreeable Regan and say, "Gosh, Don, I think I'll do it." Come back, Jim Baker, come back.

PERU MOVES LEFT
Penny Lernoux

THE SHAKY FARM CREDIT SYSTEM
Jim Schwab

HEALTH THREAT IN THE FIELDS
Henry Weinstein

'DISCOVERY—THE NATION' AWARDS

SAVVY LADIES
Andrew Kopkind

IBSEN & AIDS
Paul Berman

INSIDE NAMIBIA

SOUTH AFRICA DIGS IN FOR A LONG STAY

DAVID L. GOODMAN

Rundu, Namibia

The tarred road, we were assured, was safe. South African soldiers had swept it for mines that morning. We drove north to the Namibian-Angolan border through a landscape that bore the scars of a full-scale war. The countryside had been defoliated and depopulated by the South African Defense Force (S.A.D.F.) about a year ago in an effort to "pacify" the area. Only scattered remains of the peasant communities were left. The South Africans have methods for dealing with rural inhabitants who refuse to leave voluntarily. First they destroy a village's water pump, a lifeline in Namibia's often arid climate, giving the villagers the choice of leaving or dying. As a last resort, there is the crude but effective technique of leveling the entire area with bulldozers.

Here in this small border town, perched on a river embankment overlooking Angola, the social impact of the war is everywhere in evidence. Alcohol flows as steadily as the nearby Okavango River. The drab color of S.A.D.F. trucks, tanks and uniforms is ubiquitous. The whites from South Africa mingle uncomfortably with the black Namibians, unsure of who their friends are in this desert outpost.

Proceeding deeper into the bush, we pass a heavily guarded and fortified compound. Inside the barbed-wire fence, the trappings of white civilization serve to remind the S.A.D.F. soldiers of what they are fighting for: rose gardens, manicured lawns and domestic servants. Outside the fence, in the words of South African author J.M. Coetzee, the "barbarians" lie in wait.

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LETTERS.

TENDENTIOUS OPINIONS

New York City

Michael Massing's "Hard Questions on Nicaragua" [April 6] is a tendentious pile of opinions masquerading as keen political analysis. A full-length essay could be written exposing its errors; I shall here confine myself to three points.

(1) Massing uses journalistic buzzwords to manipulate the reader with a frequency seldom seen beyond the overseas desk of *The New York Times*. Foremost is the "hard/soft" dichotomy, which Massing plays two ways. First, the use of "hard" in the title suggests that Massing, in the grand Kissingerian tradition, is going to swallow hard and ask the tough questions that the targets of his complaints (North Americans sympathetic to the Sandinista revolution) are presumably afraid to ask. No doubt we who are "soft on Sandinismo" in the 1980s are the same people who were soft on communism in the 1970s, the 1960s, etc., and who had a good word to say for the storming of the Winter Palace and the Paris Commune.

Massing also uses "hard" and "soft" to describe hoped-for splits in the Sandinista leadership. His discussion of the mid-1970s factions in the F.S.L.N. is nothing new to anyone who has read at least one book on the Nicaraguan revolution. But he fails to demonstrate that the key actors still think of themselves as Terceristas or G.P.P.-istas, *or* that the "split" has had a significant impact on Sandinista policy.

To argue that significant splits exist in the Sandinista directorate, Massing resorts to that old game which Marvin and Bernard Kalb now probably enjoy playing with each other: "publicly/privately." "In public," Massing writes, "the directorate's nine members have maintained remarkable unity. In private, however, the debate has often been sharp." On the one hand, Massing is asking us to rely on unverifiable insider information, perhaps nothing more than gossip, in support of his case. It is not clear how he would be privy to such information. On the other hand, what would be surprising about sharp debate in the directorate? Why would we not expect it there while expecting it in every other political leadership from Washington to Moscow?

(2) In his rush to condemn the Sandinistas for failing to live up to a political science textbook's model of democracy, Massing completely ignores the most exciting aspect of the Nicaraguan revolutionary process: the development of mass organizations of participatory democracy. Fortunately, by now there are thousands of North Americans who have visited Nicaragua and who can testify to the vitality of these organizations which demand accountability of even the highest-ranking Sandinistas.

(3) The real targets of Massing's scribblings are North American leftists who, like myself, find much to admire in the Nicaraguan revolution and its Sandinista leadership. We are accused of naïveté, of having "accepted at face value Sandinista claims of nonalignment." Nonsense! From our work in Nicaragua we know that for a small, poor country under attack by *the* global superpower, nonalignment means an active policy of soliciting aid from all quarters. I am sure that if by some fluke the Sandinistas were able to buy arms for the war against the United States and its *contra* flunkies from Boeing and General Dynamics, they would be happy to do so. Since that is unlikely to happen, Nicaragua must turn to the Soviet bloc and Western Europe for the bulk of its aid, military and otherwise.

Massing accuses "some on the left" of accepting a formulation that allows that "in revolutionary societies, freedom and equality do not mix." It's easy for second-rate polemicists to construct superficially compelling arguments against opponents they are unwilling or unable to identify. But having traveled in the Dominican Republic and Mexico, I can state that the people I met there—though they have more material possessions than do the Nicaraguans—felt both less free and less equal than the people I met in Nicaragua. For that matter, *I* felt more free and more equal in Managua than I do in the New York City of Ed Koch, Donald Trump and Bernhard Goetz.

What Massing counsels as "accommodation" on the part of the Nicaraguans and the U.S. left to the United States' role as Western Hemisphere superpower is nothing less than a policy of surrender: not merely the surrender of a revolution in one small country but surrender to what historian William Appleman Williams has called—in the pages of *The Nation* five years ago—the notion of "empire as a way of life." What is being contested in the Central American revolutions, and what those revolutions are teaching people in the United States to contest, is the notion that the United States (more precisely, the U.S. ruling class) has a natural right to dominate the nations of this hemisphere and to dictate internal policies inimical to the interests of the vast majority of their people. If even a nonrevolutionary like Jesse Jackson could state that "Central America is not our back door; it's our *next* door," how can Massing ask either us or the Nicaraguans to capitulate to the notion that "the United States regards the Caribbean Basin as its backyard"? How can we accede to what Massing wishfully calls the "Finlandization" of Central America when we know that the process would more likely be its Afghanistanization—or, more accurately, its Vietnamization? Better to die on our feet than live on our knees.

James E. Keenan

LET THE NICARAGUANS DECIDE

Oakland, Calif.

While I agree with Michael Massing that it is important to maintain an open debate about Nicaragua, it seems to me that in one sense the progressives who debate the "hard questions on Nicaragua" are guilty of the same arrogance that permeates the Administration's dealings with the Sandinistas. Nowhere do those progressives consider what the Nicaraguan population thinks. They fail to understand that for the Nicaraguans the bottom line is not socialism or capitalism but rather self-determination.

After spending five weeks in Nicaragua last fall researching the elections, I got the strong impression that the Nicaraguan people are not duped about the problems with their revolution. At the same time, they don't need or want Americans, reactionary or progressive, telling them what to do.

It is easy in a five-minute, man-on-the-street interview to elicit strong criticism of the Sandinistas, but it is a mistake to consider all such critics to be supporters of the *contras* or even anti-Sandinista. I talked to a 15-year-old militiaman named Raúl for several hours while he guarded the tomb of Carlos Fonseca in Managua. He told me that his superiors took advantage of rank and indulged in the petty harassment typical of armies the world over. He said that the pay was too low and that he hated combat duty because he was certain he would eventually be killed. But when I pressed him about why he stayed in the militia if he was so dissatisfied, he replied: "We can't stand with our arms folded. The *contras* kill women and children and the old, and we have to protect them."

Massing criticizes the F.S.L.N. for banning strikes. As a labor lawyer, I also deplore that prohibition. What he doesn't mention is that during the period in which strikes were banned there were dozens, some say hundreds, of work stoppages, many by Sandinista unions, and that the F.S.L.N. never once sent the police or army to suppress them. Apparently the F.S.L.N. realized the futility of banning strikes and legalized them. Is that evidence of people being crushed by totalitarianism or of people forcing their leaders to listen to their demands? Nobody says the Sandinistas are perfect. The correct question to ask is, Do they listen to the people and respond to criticism? There are many instances in which they have.

In Massing's rush to scold the F.S.L.N., he says that *turbas* evicted the leaders of the Confederation of Labor Unity (C.U.S.) from their headquarters last summer. In August, a group of dissident C.U.S. members occupied their union headquarters. I spoke with them. They told me they had occupied the office to protest the

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EDITORIALS.

The Communicators

This year's Pulitzer Prizes have passed into history, leaving the winners a little richer and the culture mercifully no poorer. The most ballyhooed feature of the laudations was the addition of two categories, specialized and explanatory journalism. The idea was, we presume, that in an increasingly complex, fast-changing world, etc., etc., the trade of journalism must encourage specialists who can cover arcane fields like law and science, and communicators who can disentangle Lebanese politics or the budgetary process and serve them up, on deadline, cleanly and lucidly. Although Hildy Johnson and the crew from *The Front Page* would retch in their spittoons at the thought, more and more journalists today must acquire a string of degrees before they can cover a beat. Still, we worry a little about the integrity of the two new categories. Will specialized journalists eventually get so bogged down in their abstruse fields of knowledge that the explanatory people will have to be called in to ghost their stuff?

Journalism, the college catalogues tell us, is communication, so it is something of a self-libel that the profession celebrates President Reagan as the Great Communicator. As Mark Green has demonstrated in these pages and in his book *There He Goes Again: Ronald Reagan's Reign of Error,*

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the Great Communicator has at times been the Great Prevaricator. Not that journalists are above reproach; not that the Pulitzers are above reproach, for that matter, as past scandals involving invented articles and philistine judges have shown. Reporters can be biased or just dead wrong, but they are rarely mendacious. The best of them regard their trade as a calling; their mission, to make sense out of the semantic noise from the false communicators.

As it happens, the Pulitzer committee honored two of the country's best journalists this year, men who have enlightened and enlivened our lives for many years. They are Studs Terkel, winner of the award for nonfiction, and Murray Kempton, cited for commentary. Terkel's special talent is to serve as a medium for the voices of ordinary Americans. On his radio program and in his oral histories, he reproduces the *vox populi* unfiltered (though skillfully elicited and edited). He creates the living past through Americans talking, as they do at the drugstore or on the front porch: "I remember . . . "

Murray Kempton belongs to that unique journalistic breed, the literate columnist, in the tradition of H.L. Mencken, Eugene Field, Finley Peter Dunne and the rest. With wit, irony and a style of Proustian complexity, he illumines the sad, mean urban world for readers of *The New York Review of Books* and *Newsday* alike. His is a sensibility that invests the ordinary with significance, pop heroes with elegance. Consider this tribute to Willie Mays: "He was the only promise the rich ever kept to the poor. They said he would be great and he was." He can also wield a deadly Menckenian lance. He once called a book by the editor of *Commentary* "the latest in the series of comic masterpieces which Norman Podhoretz issues every six months in the guise of autobiography."

The importance of communication was underscored last week, when Washington again chose confrontation over diplomacy in Central America. Thus the cross-cultural exchange sponsored by The Nation Institute in New York City this week (see page 555 for details) comes at a fortuitously apt time. The purpose of the event, called Diálogo de Todas las Americas, is to emphasize binding artistic concerns over divisive military threats and economic pressures. As poet and principal sponsor Rose Styron observed: "The cultural relationship between North and South is undervalued. Political and military considerations dominate and distort the relations between our countries."

Conrail Giveaway

Even by the generous corporate welfare standards of the Reagan Administration, the planned giveaway of Conrail is extraordinary. Taxpayers have sunk more than $3 billion into the railroad since it was created from the wreckage of the bankrupt Penn Central and six other lines in the Northeast, in 1976. Nevertheless, Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole is pushing a sweetheart package that would, in effect, pay the highly profitable Norfolk Southern to take Conrail off the government's hands.

Conrail is profitable—it earned $500 million last year—and it has $800 million in cash reserves. Yet Norfolk Southern is offering only $1.2 billion for the government's 85 percent share, and $375 million to Conrail employees for their 15 percent stake in the company. That means a net price of $775 million when the $800 million in Conrail cash it will acquire is subtracted—a bargain. The merger would create the nation's largest freight railroad, controlling nearly half of all rail freight east of the Mississippi.

But Norfolk will pay nothing like $775 million after taxes because it will acquire a tax shelter the size of the Astrodome. Conrail has $3 billion in assets. Each year Norfolk can depreciate a set percentage of those as a business expense, thus reducing the earnings it reports to the Internal Revenue Service. That $3 billion base could be worth as much as $1.4 billion in total tax savings for Norfolk. Norfolk wants that umbrella because it chose accelerated five-year depreciation in the wake of the 1981 tax bill. The bulk of those benefits will run out at the end of next year, so it faces a huge tax bite. In all, the government will subsidize Norfolk Southern, in the form of reduced taxes, to the tune of several hundred million dollars.

The anticompetitive consequences of the sale are also troubling. Conrail's scrappy, market-savvy approach has enabled it to prosper since railroad deregulation in 1980. The elimination of Conrail could bring back the days when the nation's trains were run by a few monopolies. Yet Dole encouraged the Justice Department to approve the merger with a minimum of review and waived hearings by the Interstate Commerce Commission. She has steadfastly opposed a proposal by Conrail management to keep the railroad independent by floating a public stock offering, saying she is more interested in putting it in strong hands than in preserving competition or getting a higher purchase price. That's a hell of a way to run—or not run—a railroad, and Congressional opponents are trying to block the sale.

Albert Maltz

It's unfashionable these days to refer to somebody as an antifascist, but Albert Maltz, who died last week at the age of 76, was an antifascist. He was also a playwright, novelist, screenwriter, O. Henry Award winner, blacklistee, Communist, former Communist, jailbird (for refusing to tell the House Committee on Un-American Activities whether he was a Communist) and critic of Soviet repression and U.S. violations of civil liberties.

Through it all, he was an antifascist. His 1944 novel, *The Cross and the Arrow*, concerned the German anti-Nazi resistance movement, and at the time of his death he was working on one about the French Resistance, called *Bel Canto*. He won an Academy Award for *The House I Live In*, a documentary which celebrated America's democratic, i.e., antifascist, values.

What distinguished Maltz's brand of antifascism was its

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passionate independence. He went his own way. He got in trouble with his comrades for complaining about the esthetic straitjacket the party put on its writers. He got in trouble with HUAC for refusing to don *their* political straitjacket.

In later years he got in an epistolary wrangle with Dalton Trumbo, a fellow member of the Hollywood Ten, about whether the Hollywood informers were also "victims," as Trumbo, in a spirit of recognition, said they were. In the course of that debate Maltz, who never forgave the colleagues who cooperated with the Congressional inquisitors, made a point with which no one, not even the generous Trumbo, could disagree: "If an informer in the French underground who sent a friend to the torture chambers of the Gestapo was equally a victim, then there can be no right or wrong in life that I understand."

Maltz's death—or, rather, his life—should remind President Reagan, as he ponders those who lie in Bitburg, that the message of the ever-unfashionable antifascists is as relevant today as it was forty years ago.

Scuttling Peace

Last October 19, Congress passed the United States Institute of Peace Act, creating a new government office dedicated to advancing and coordinating national efforts against violence. It was a small gesture; Congress appropriated just $14 million—precisely the amount of walking-around money President Reagan requested for the Nicaraguan *contras*. The bill was, perhaps, nothing more than a symbolic affirmation that peace is a legitimate concern of the U.S. government. But the White House has fought the institute through every stage of the legislative process.

Reagan signed the act only because it was attached to the Defense Department budget. He ignored the law's April 20 deadline for appointing a board of directors, and he has asked Congress to pass a set of amendments that would effectively eviscerate the institute. The White House refused to respond to queries about the missed deadline or the proposed amendments, but the clear implication is that the institute will not be given a board of directors, thus will not exist, until the amendments that undermine it become law. Once again, when presented with an opportunity to demonstrate good faith in the cause of peace, the President has shown belligerence. Now that Congress has saved him the $14 million he was going to throw at the *contras*, which was portrayed as only a symbolic gesture of support, he can afford a real contribution to a far worthier effort.

AWARD TO SALISBURY

Harrison E. Salisbury has won the Special Sidney Hillman Foundation Officers Award for "The Strange Correspondence of Morris Ernst and John Edgar Hoover, 1939–1964," which appeared in our December 1, 1984, issue.

Nonaligned Speak

The South African government's April 18 announcement that it intended to recognize a puppet government in Namibia called the Multi-Party Conference [see David L. Goodman's cover story] came on the eve of a meeting in New Delhi by the Non-Aligned Movement's coordinating bureau on the territory. The N.A.M. body, which has actively supported the cause of Namibian independence for two decades, took several strong actions in response. Most important, it called on the U.N. Security Council to take up the issue forthwith and it pledged military and material support for the Namibian liberation movement, Swapo, and for the frontline states.

In his first address as chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi provided further backing for Swapo by granting it full diplomatic recognition. India's action opens the door for other countries in the movement to follow suit. Diplomatic recognition will give Swapo international legitimacy as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people and will make any negotiations for an independence settlement impossible without its participation.

The mood in New Delhi was more determined than at previous meetings of the coordinating bureau. Faced with South Africa's clear refusal to resolve the Namibian question through diplomacy, the N.A.M. was forced to re-examine its security policies in the region and to develop new techniques to oppose South African violations of the sovereignty of the frontline states. The Angolan Foreign Minister made it clear that his country would not give in to South African and U.S. demands that Cuban troops be removed as a condition for Namibian independence. The Nigerian Foreign Minister echoed a growing sentiment in Africa when he suggested at a press conference that his government was willing to send volunteers to Angola if requested. When the N.A.M. representatives meet in that country's capital, Luanda, in September, they are expected to take more decisive action on providing military support to Angola and the states bordering South Africa.

Another significant development in New Delhi was the widespread recognition by the delegates that the responsibility for Namibian independence has shifted from Pretoria to Washington. Even staunch U.S. allies like Egypt joined the call for the United States to pressure South Africa to end its illegal occupation of the territory. Ironically, that demand is in keeping with the Reagan Administration's policy of bypassing the United Nations and other agents of multilateral diplomacy in the region.

Putting to rest speculation to the contrary at the New Delhi meeting, Gandhi showed his determination to continue the nonaligned foreign policies of his mother, Indira Gandhi, and his grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru. The Reagan Administration would do well to keep that in mind when the Prime Minister visits the United States next month.

A.W. SINGHAM

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Weinberger Defense Cuts

EDWARD SOREL

AS SECRETARY OF DEFENSE I MUST PROTEST THE CHARGE THAT THE MILITARY BUDGET IS SOMEHOW BLOATED.
WE'VE CUT OUR BUDGET AS MUCH AS WE DARE WITHOUT WEAKENING OUR DEFENSE POSTURE.
WE'VE PHASED OUT MANY COSTLY FIGHTER PLANES, ELIMINATED ALL OBSOLETE MISSILE PROGRAMS...
...AND REPLACED THEM WITH A NO-FRILLS, COST-EFFICIENT WEAPONS SYSTEM.
UNFORTUNATELY, THESE NEW WEAPONS HAVE DOUBLED OUR FORMER BUDGET.
BUT THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CUT MILITARY SPENDING!

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Never overestimate your enemy. Never despise the obvious. These are among the maxims I mutter to myself as I pad around the nation's capital. If I'm not careful, I may find that I've started to judge the place by its own pseudorealistic standards—of "credibility," "delivering," "clout" and "the bottom line." I long ago had a tattoo inscribed on the sole of my foot empowering my relatives to judge me brain dead in that event and to throw the switch without remorse.

Surrounded as one is by babble and mendacity, it's nonetheless important to avoid cynicism. I don't mind appearing naïve or outraged or shocked. I don't desire the composure of a Robert Strauss, say, or the wised-up idiocy of a Les Aspin. And I have just finished reading a report that ought to test the nerve and sinew of public opinion, and that probably won't.

"The Strategic Defense Initiative: Costs, Contractors and Consequences" is produced by the Council on Economic Priorities. Did you think that you already knew Star Wars was a corporate bonanza? Of course you did; you weren't born yesterday. But did you appreciate the following?

§ A total of $24.2 billion has been allocated to research the Strategic Defense Initiative for five years. This figure is comparable to the research *and* production costs of the MX missile and the B-1 bomber.

§ Of the $1.7 billion already awarded to develop the weapons of SDI, $1.4 billion went to ten top arms contractors. Six of these companies have contracts to determine the feasibility of the system that they would build. These very same firms are also producing the next wave (often stupidly called the "next generation") of nuclear weapons. They are Rockwell (MX missile, B-1 bomber), Martin Marietta (Pershing missile), Lockheed (Trident missile), Boeing (cruise missile and B-1), Avco (MX and B-1) and Litton (cruise). In other words, forget the idea that SDI will mean the abolition of mutual assured destruction. It is a subsidy to its armorers.

§ More than 75 percent of the SDI contracts already awarded have been thrown to Congressional districts whose members sit on the House or Senate Armed Services Committee or on the House or Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

Any one of these three findings would be sufficient evidence of a scandalous collusion between the executive branch and the contractors to make a reality of SDI without the inconvenience of a debate. Already, you notice, the Star Wars program has become like the assault on Nicaragua. Congress asks not "Should we do it?" but "Should we *be doing* it?"

Washington has become so hardened to "overlaps" and "overruns" under this Administration that the changing of titles and uniforms between board meetings has come to seem as natural as breathing. The President's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control, for example, is chaired by the president of R&D Associates, which is an important SDI contractor. Over at the Defense Department, the situation is even more *intime*. The Fletcher commission, the Pentagon's advisory panel on defense technologies, managed to seat representatives of General Atomic Corporation, Science Applications, Hughes Aircraft, Aerojet General and others whose sole occupation in commission meetings was watching one chubby hand as it laved the other.

Add to this, if you will, recent findings by the Associated Press. In a purely heuristic survey, the A.P. found that the top twenty military contractors have doubled their political donations since Reagan took office. Last year they made $3.6 million in "contributions" to Congressional and Presidential campaigns. Of the twenty House members who copped more than $15,000 each from defense contractor PACs, seventeen voted for the MX. Of the fourteen senators who inhaled more than $30,000 from the same source, thirteen backed the MX. And columnists write serious prose about the mystery of Ronald Reagan's political magnetism when he really wants a new missile.

Rockwell made political contributions of $59,625 in 1980. Last year, according to the Federal Election Commission, it laid out $328,440. That 450 percent increase was more than matched by the growth in Rockwell's share of the aerospace pie, from $1 billion to $8.4 billion in the same period. Lockheed hiked its PAC funding by only 325 percent, to an admittedly stunning $420,191. But then, its Pentagon contracts increased only from $2 billion to $5.2 billion in the four-year spread.

Senator John Warner, the Virginia Republican whose ability to find his way to the Capitol is a source of private astonishment to his friends, is a ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He pulled down $80,050 from the arms traders in 1984 and claims the money made no difference to his attitude. I dare say. Senator Ted Stevens, the nondescript Alaska Republican who heads up the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, is better off by $60,800 for his association with the gunrunners. No doubt he too is at a loss to explain why they went to all that trouble and expense. He probably thinks it was just humanitarian aid.

This sort of thing is perfectly intelligible to those of us old troupers who remember the Lebanese parliament in the 1960s and the brave days of the Fourth Republic. You knew where you were, and you knew the tariff. What irritates me, I realize, is the pious insistence of groups like the Council on Economic Priorities and Common Cause. They harp and whine about "conflicts of interest" or, more touchingly still, "potential conflicts of interest," whereas what we see in Congress every day is harmony of interest, long celebrated and enshrined, between those who fashion weapons and those who humbly fashion "consensus." If there were any real conflict of interest, Congress would by now have voted against at least one missile appropriation. It's never happened, and it probably never will. While the rest of us worry about the nuclear winter, the contractors and their bought politicians are celebrating a nuclear spring.

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ARTICLES.

PERU MOVES LEFT

Will the People Now Take Power?

PENNY LERNOUX

Lima

On his visit here in February, Pope John Paul II was showered with gifts, including the usual medallions, religious statues and paintings. But there was one unexpected item, a box of unexposed X-ray plates, presented on behalf of Lima's tuberculosis victims during a massive rally at a local slum. This city of 5 million has few X-ray machines in public hospitals, and most lack film or don't work. The offering therefore served a practical purpose, since the plates were donated to a needy hospital, but it also reaffirmed the people's refusal to give up. Because of growing poverty in Lima's overcrowded slums, malnutrition, tuberculosis and typhoid are on the rise. But the TB victims, who call themselves "the weakest of the weak," have become a recognized political force in the slums by organizing to demand their rights. Their symbol is the tree of life.

The TB sufferers' organization is one of hundreds of groups that have sprung up since the 1960s to help the poor in their struggle for survival. Although the battle has become increasingly cruel because of Peru's worsening economic plight, they carry on with Sisyphean determination. "We are accustomed to solving problems," said an Irish priest who has worked in Lima's slums for the past two decades. "These people are used to living with them. Yet they still have hope."

Because in most Latin American countries little is heard from the impoverished masses, the U.S. press generally ignores them. The few articles written about Peru focus on its $13.6 billion foreign debt, the drug traffic or the Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") guerrillas. But in the cities, where a majority of Peruvians live, there are stirrings of social awareness among first- and second-generation peasant migrants. That awakening undoubtedly influenced the outcome of last month's presidential and congressional elections, in which Alan García Pérez of the revitalized left-of-center APRA party (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) won 47 percent of the vote. The second-place finisher, Lima Mayor Alfonso Barrantes Lingán, represents a Marxist coalition called the United Left (I.U.). Although a runoff was required because García did not win a majority, Barrantes withdrew from it on April 25. García will thus be sworn in on July 28.

Although traditional obstacles to Peru's progress remain—the military is just as bloody-minded, the oligarchy just as blindly selfish as always—the grass-roots organizing that developed in the late 1960s under President Juan Velasco Alvarado, an unusual reformist general, has borne fruit in neighborhood movements and municipal councils. Left-wing factions have matured sufficiently to be able to work together on occasion, and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church has also helped by identifying with the slum dwellers who make up a majority of the urban population.

Clearly the grass-roots groups can do nothing about the 70 percent unemployment and underemployment rate and the soaring inflation, but they have effected some modest changes. In the sprawling slum of Villa El Salvador, in the desert circling Lima, new homes with brick and cement walls have replaced those made with reed mats. Many have gardens despite the scarcity of water, and some of the roads are beginning to be paved. Mobilized block by block, Salvador's 350,000 people elect their own mayor and municipal council; both constantly pressure the city government for more improvements. As do most political leaders in the *pueblos jovenes* (or "young towns," a euphemism for the slums), Salvador's mayor supports the I.U. The slum movements are a force for democratic change, and they serve as a counterweight to the right-wing military and their allies in the upper classes, as well as to the viciousness of Sendero Luminoso.

The plight of the poor has become more desperate as Peru's economic situation deteriorates. The government is broke, unable to pay even token interest on its foreign debt (it stopped paying off the principal last year). And because of on-again, off-again arrangements with the International Monetary Fund, the country is in its worst depression of this century. Real wages have declined by about 40 percent in the past four years, and no one expects a recovery. Local banks are charging interest rates of 160 to 200 percent a year, and businesses are collapsing daily. Currency speculation draws mobs of unshaven fortune seekers to the streets outside Lima's exchange houses. It is one of Peru's few successful economic activities.

Once a regal metropolis, Lima is beginning to look like Calcutta. Nearly one-third of Peru's population is crowded into the city and its environs. Thousands of poor people descend on the downtown area daily, hawking peanuts, fruit, eggs, hats, telephone tokens, individual cigarettes, even rocks. The peddlers, many of them women, are lucky if they earn enough in a day to pay for the two-hour bus ride home and a bag of potatoes to feed their families. While they work, their babies lie on newspapers on the street under the merciless sun, and toddlers play in the dirty water in the gutters. The people are dressed in tattered clothing, and they look infinitely tired and sad.

A recent two-year study by economists here indicates the extent of this economic anarchy: street vendors and other underemployed people account for two-thirds of the city's economic activity; 20 percent of their earnings are siphoned

Penny Lernoux is The Nation*'s Latin America correspondent and the author of* In Banks We Trust *(Doubleday).*

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off in bribes to policemen and other petty government functionaries who allow the hawkers to operate. Most of the surviving large industrial and agricultural holdings are controlled by multinational interests or the descendants of Spanish grandees, who keep their enterprises afloat more through political connections than business acumen.

In his early novels Mario Vargas Llosa noted that in Peru, corruption is endemic and classless, a means of survival for the poor and a way of life for the rich. Although personable and gracious, President Fernando Belaúnde Terry lacked the strength and the vision to deal with the nation's deep structural problems, preferring to deal with economic and political crises on a day-to-day basis. A well-to-do architect who served as President from 1963 to October 1968, when he was ousted by the military, Belaúnde was re-elected in 1980, mostly because no one else was available. Having been burned once, he did not attempt to curb the generals, who are accustomed to ruling Peru through repression and bribes.

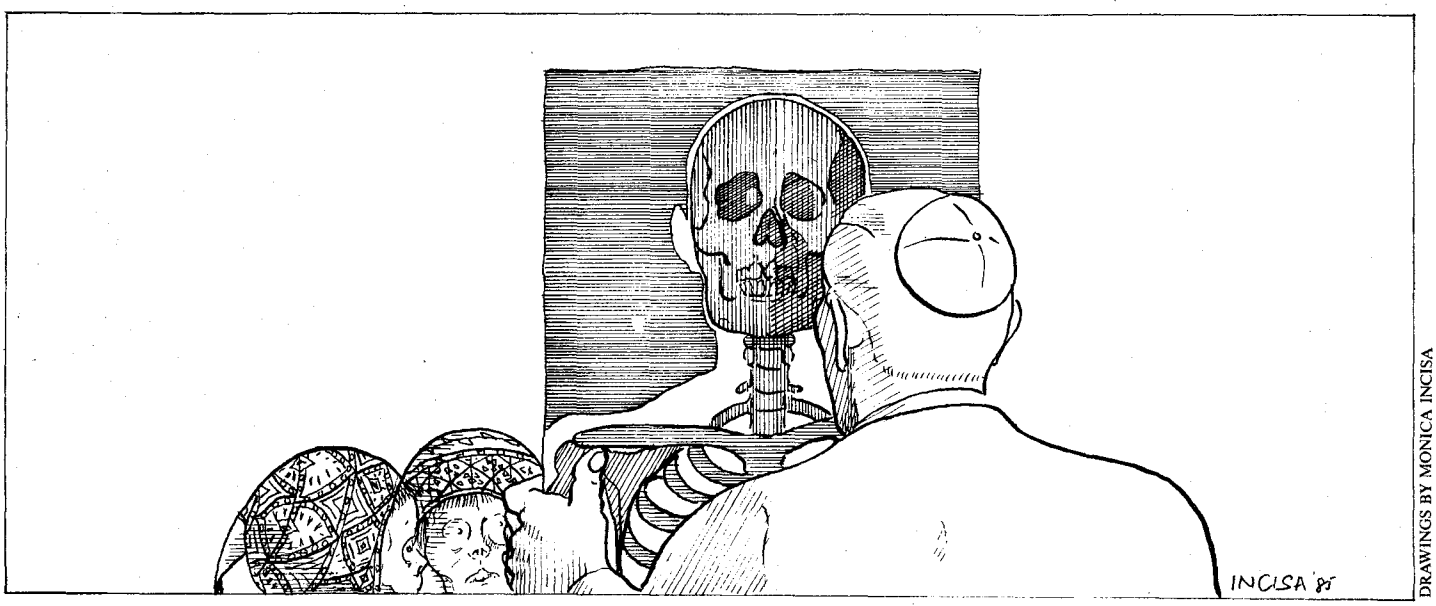
In a society with glaring contrasts of wealth and poverty, guerrilla uprisings are inevitable. The last major rebellion occurred in the late 1960s, in and around the Valley of La Convención, near the ancient Inca capital of Cuzco, and was a major reason for the coup that brought General Velasco to power. Some of the guerrilla leaders subsequently joined the Velasco government because he had promised reforms. In 1974, he introduced the Inca Plan, which called for the state or the workers to own most enterprises. The experiment lasted until 1975, when Gen. Francisco Morales Bermúdez Cerruti overthrew Velasco. A parade of conservative generals followed, until the restoration of civilian rule in 1980.

As happens in other Latin American countries, each swing of the pendulum in Peru has provoked a more violent response, culminating in the rise of Sendero Luminoso. Sendero, which makes previous insurgents look like Boy Scouts, was founded in the 1960s by Manuel Abimael Guzmán, a university professor, in the impoverished, semifeudal southern department of Ayacucho. Operating in the barren Andean highlands, Guzmán and his followers espoused an odd program, advocating a violent cleansing of Andean society while invoking pseudo-Incan mysticism. The group attracted followers among university and high-school students, and by the end of 1982 it had become so formidable that the government imposed martial law in the area.

In the ensuing violence, peasants were the principal victims. Priests and nuns working in the region believe a majority of the more than 4,000 people killed have been frightened Indians caught between guerrilla reprisals if they did not cooperate and military vengeance if they did. Amnesty International reported last January that it is often impossible to ascertain who is responsible for atrocities because many of the corpses are so mangled that they are unrecognizable or are buried in hidden graves. But there is no doubt that the armed forces' campaign to wipe out the insurgents has been at least as vicious as Sendero.

Argentina has traditionally been Peru's closest regional ally, and there are clear parallels between events in Ayacucho and Argentina's "dirty war": disappearances, mass graves and institutionalized torture in military concentration camps. Army commanders have also encouraged the formation of peasant paramilitary squads to attack villages supposedly sympathetic to Sendero. Informed sources say, however, that often the raiders are only settling old scores, particularly land feuds.

As in Argentina, the principal targets of the military are community leaders—in this case, Quechua-speaking peasants—as well as teachers, human rights advocates and journalists. A local judicial investigation of the 1983 massacre of eight Peruvian reporters in the village of Uchuraccay has refuted the government's claim, which had been corroborated by a commission under Vargas Llosa, that the journalists were murdered by peasants who mistook them for Sendero guerrillas. The Superior Court of Ayacucho has produced ample evidence that they were killed by members of the government's security forces. Another reporter, who was investigating the 1984 massacre of six Protestant pas-



DRAWINGS BY MONICA INCISA

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tors, has not been seen since he visited a military command post last August. The impact of the killings and the disappearance on Peruvian journalists has been dramatic: few are willing to risk their lives by venturing into the Ayacucho backlands. Consequently the military is the source of most newspaper reports on the violence; invariably, the stories refer to those killed as "subversives" who died in "confrontations." Nevertheless, Mayor Leonor Zamora of Ayacucho agrees with Amnesty International's contention that at least a thousand people have disappeared following detention by the military and that there are probably several hundred additional, unreported victims.

The news blackout and Sendero's hermetic ways make it difficult to judge the extent of the guerrillas' influence, but available information suggests it is confined to the remote provinces of Ayacucho and the adjoining departments of Huancavelica and Apurimac. While the guerrillas have reaped international publicity by blowing up police stations and power lines in Lima, knowledgeable Peruvians say their support among the poor is limited to small groups of youths, frustrated by the lack of jobs and educational opportunities. Social workers, doctors, community organizers and others with experience in the slums say that most of the urban poor reject guerrilla violence, preferring a peaceful opening to the left through the Marxist coalition, while the middle and lower middle classes back APRA. Their opinion is supported by local polls and the results of the 1983 municipal elections.

Since its repudiation in the last election, Belaúnde's Popular Action party is all but dead. The only other consequential party on the right is the Democratic Convergence Party, which received 11 percent of the vote, compared with the United Left's 23 percent. The political spectrum has thus shifted to the left. The only important countervailing force is the military, and as Peruvian history shows, it should not be underestimated.

Belaúnde will be the first civilian President to hand over power to a civilian successor since 1945, and the military has a long history of opposition to APRA. It has resorted to coups to prevent it from taking power. But the party is now social-democratic in outlook, and the generals find it preferable to the Marxist coalition. Furthermore, taking on the new government in the country's present economic state would be unpopular and counterproductive. Selective military repression will probably continue, however, including periodic sweeps of the slums, arbitrary arrests and raids on human rights organizations.

APRA has undergone a generational change and is controlled by young technocrats more in tune with Peruvian realities, unlike the party's founder, Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who became increasingly reactionary in the years before his death, in 1979. Although García is only 35, he makes up for his inexperience with a charismatic style and a fresh approach to old problems.

Still, he faces a worsening economic mess, as well as the Sendero threat and an unleashed military. One might think he would seek a coalition with the I.U., since, as one APRA candidate said before the election, no one party can solve the country's problems. However, APRA has won a solid majority in both houses of Congress, and it is doubtful that its conservative wing or the military would allow a formal marriage. The I.U. is similarly divided, with more than six fractious leftist movements yoked together under Barrantes's energetic leadership. "God forbid that we should actually win the elections," said an I.U. candidate for the Senate before the race. "The whole thing would come apart in six months."

Both APRA and the I.U. are hampered by Peruvian traditions and history, which emphasize a feudal-style *cacique* leadership and a top-down approach to economic and social problems. Barrantes's milk distribution program for Lima's poor, for example, has been only partially successful because the university-trained, leftist intellectuals responsible for it have failed to consult the popular organizations about how and where the powdered milk should be distributed. Women's organizations, which have played a major role in the slums' political awakening, complain bitterly about the bureaucrats' decision to scotch the original plan, in which one woman on each block converted the powder to milk on a weekly rotation. Believing it would be more efficient to deliver a monthly supply to each family, the bureaucrats failed to understand that the daily meeting of slum mothers to pick up the milk brought together these isolated women for mutual support and provided a sense of collective accomplishment.

How the emerging center-left deals with such problems will determine the future of Sendero Luminoso. Despite the increasing impoverishment of their constituency, the slum movements offer a genuinely democratic, bottom-up alternative to guerrilla violence and the more traditional repression of the oligarchy and the military. But whether APRA's leaders appreciate the movement's importance is doubtful, because dealing with the country's desperate economic condition is their top priority.

An American priest who has lived in Lima's slums for many years quotes the familiar phrase "*Ratero, coquero, Sendero*"—"Crime, drugs or Sendero." Admitting that the refrain oversimplifies the possibilities open to Peru's impoverished youth, he says it sums up their sense of alienation. Of the three, Sendero may prove the least attractive. Or such has been the experience of Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá and

FOOTNOTE ON AN HISTORIC CASE: IN RE ALGER HISS

William A. Reuben, in his 1983 booklet, identifies 114 factual errors in the Federal District Court of New York's 1982 decision upholding Hiss's conviction for perjury in 1950. That flawed decision, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983, stands as the last legal word on one of the most celebrated cases in modern history. 1 copy $5, 10 copies $40, 50 copies $150, 100 copies $250. Make checks payable to The Nation Institute and send to "Hiss," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

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Mexico City, slum-ridden metropolises where crime rates have soared with no parallel increase in political activism. "For years people have been predicting that Lima would explode," a U.S. journalist with long experience in Peru told me. "But it could turn out to be like Calcutta, where people just suffer more." The tragedy is that after two decades of massive grass-roots organizing, Peru may miss the opportunity to throw off its feudal chains for a more participatory society. The poor will undoubtedly continue to believe in the tuberculosis victims' tree of life, if only because there is no alternative. One wonders how they will nourish it. □

FORECLOSING ITS OWN

The Shaky Farm Credit System

JIM SCHWAB

Perry Wilson of Cameron, Missouri, has been farming for more than fifty-two years, but neither he nor his sons, Perry Jr. and Randy, put in a crop this spring on their 820-acre spread in the northwest part of the state. A year and a half ago, after five decades of paying their bills on time, they missed a mortgage payment. Perry Jr. says their financial problems started because of "controlled low prices and high interest rates." Then the Federal Land Bank of St. Louis foreclosed their mortgage and scheduled a sheriff's sale for March 15 on the steps of the Clinton County courthouse, in Plattsburg.

The Wilsons have been active in the farm movement for a long time, and they claim that the Federal Land Bank never fully informed them of their rights. So it was no surprise that when the day of the sale arrived, they had some supporters on hand. Urged on by various farm groups, more than 1,000 farmers and trade unionists assembled in front of the courthouse for a rally and shouted "No sale!" for nearly a half-hour. Several of the demonstrators were arrested and a number suffered bruises after a shoving match broke out between them and police and sheriff's deputies. The Federal Land Bank trustee who was "conducting" the sale announced that the only bidder was the Federal Land Bank—$312,000 for the 700 acres up for sale. Anyone more than ten feet away could not hear him above the din. He quickly retreated inside the courthouse, which was locked for the rest of the day.

While the rally was in progress, Clinton County Sheriff Robert DeFreece told me that he had expected trouble and had called everyone from Federal Land Bank officials to

Jim Schwab is working on a book about the farm crisis, to be published later this year. He recently completed a study on farm credit for the Iowa State Legislature.

THURSDAY, MAY 9

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present

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An evening of theater,
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JONATHAN KOZOL, author of *Death at an Early Age* and *Illiterate America*

CARMEN NARANJO, Costa Rican diplomat, former Cabinet Minister and director of EDUCA, the University Publishing House of Central America

MIGUEL OTERO SILVA, a novelist and founder of *El Nacional*, a leading daily newspaper of Caracas, Venezuela

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Missouri Senator John Danforth in hope of persuading someone to call off the sale. When his efforts failed, he brought in twenty-five law officers to insure that the bidding took place at the appointed time. "This isn't the way for the farmers to make their point," he insisted. "Besides, most of these people aren't from the area."

Although that was not the first protest the Federal Land Bank had faced over a foreclosure, the Plattsburg rally may have been the largest and most determined one. It exemplified farmers' rising animosity toward the Farm Credit System (F.C.S.), a member-owned cooperative established by the government in 1916 and expanded over the years. The land bank is one of three institutions in the system, the others being the Federal Intermediate Credit Bank (F.I.C.B.) and the Bank for Cooperatives. The system covers twelve districts, each with a land, credit and cooperative bank. The land bank lends money for real estate purchases through local Land Bank Associations; the credit bank provides money for farm expenses like livestock, equipment and supplies through local Production Credit Associations; the Bank for Cooperatives funds producer-owned grain elevators, dairies and other such ventures. The land bank provides about 40 percent of all farm real estate loans and 20 percent of non-real estate loans. Its total loan portfolio exceeds $78 billion, larger than that of the Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Company, which the Federal Reserve bailed out last year.

The Farm Credit System is capitalized in two ways: the banks sell bonds on Wall Street at comparatively low interest rates, which enables them, theoretically, to loan money to farmers at reduced rates; and the borrowers purchase stock in their associations by leaving as much as 10 percent of their loans on deposit in return for shares.

Because the F.C.S. was set up specifically to serve farmers and because it is ostensibly owned and controlled by them, foreclosure sales like the one in Plattsburg leave members with a deep sense of betrayal. Amid the most depressed farm economy since the 1930s, "us" has suddenly become "them," and farmers are venting their anger on an institution they had been told to regard as a friend. That anger is a departure from the farmers' traditional tendency to blame themselves for their economic misfortunes. Seeing their neighbors face the same problems, many of them no longer meekly acquiesce when loan officers tell them they are bad managers who should get out of farming. Instead, they blame the system—which includes the Farm Credit System. As they exchange stories about their dealings with lenders, they have pieced together a troubling picture of an institution that may be concealing its financial troubles and, moreover, taking them out on its members.

In the words of former loan officer Melvin Schneider, the system is "chasing its own tail." Schneider maintains that F.C.S. loan officers consistently overvalued farms as collateral when they made loans during the inflationary 1970s. When land values fell, they panicked. Now they are undervaluing farmers' productive capacity. As a result, they are stepping up foreclosures to retire bad loans in order to cut their losses. When those farms go on the market, land values drop even more, putting other farmers in jeopardy.

Schneider is one of a growing number of former Farm Credit System employees who are helping farmers develop proposals for reforming the F.C.S. Another is Minneapolis attorney James Corum, who was general counsel and corporate secretary for the St. Paul Federal Intermediate Credit Bank until he was fired over a policy disagreement last September. Corum holds seminars throughout the nation for farmers, attorneys and financial planners on the rights of stockholder-borrowers of the Farm Credit System, and serves as a consultant to farmers and their attorneys on specific legal problems.

Heightened awareness of their rights, combined with greater militancy, has produced scenes like the Plattsburg rally and also like the February 2 meeting in Council Bluffs, Iowa, between F.C.S. officials and a delegation of twelve farmers, all stockholders in local credit associations in the Omaha district, which covers Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. The farmers presented ten demands and requested answers to ten "supplemental questions."

According to Pleasantville, Iowa, farmer Jim White, a delegation member who is fighting his credit association's attempt to foreclose on his farm, the group demanded that the officials hire an independent accounting firm to audit the Omaha F.I.C.B.'s books; make financial statements of individual associations available to members, as well as bylaws, membership lists and copies of their loan files; give members thirty days' notice before applying their stock to payment of overdue loans; and print and distribute a members' bill of rights, informing them, for example, of their right of appeal.

To Corum, the fact that members of a cooperative had to make such demands illustrates the absurdity and illegality of much of the present policy. At his seminars, he likes to repeat the statement a loan officer once made. "When times were good there was no need to tell farmers their rights, but now that times are rough, I guess we have to."

Ron Hanser, vice president for public affairs for the Omaha Farm Credit Bank, denies that information is withheld. "Most of what they were asking was readily available to them," he said. "I'm surprised by their concerns and questions."

According to Peterson, Iowa, farmer Robert Donahoo, when a group of farmers from his region who wanted to protest the firing of a sympathetic loan officer requested a copy of their credit association's bylaws in the fall of 1983, they got a runaround for several weeks. Only after Representative Berkley Bedell's office in Sioux City intervened could they obtain a copy. Nevertheless, Hanser maintains that the F.C.S. is forbidden to divulge membership lists because to do so would violate members' privacy.

Other examples of the system's inconsistency and arbitrariness are contained in a response by the Farm Credit Administration (F.C.A.), which regulates F.C.S. activities, to criticisms raised by George Bowling, a Circleville, Ohio, farmer. On April 20, 1984, in reference to one of Bowling's charges, the F.C.A. told Congress, "Stockholders generally

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have a right to such lists under corporate law." But Bowling points out that his credit association had turned down just such a request, and calls the statement one of many exercises in semantics designed to mislead Congress.

Several U.S. representatives have come to the same conclusion and are pressing for more information about Farm Credit System operations. Iowa Representative Cooper Evans has called for an audit by the General Accounting Office because he is suspicious of the F.C.A.'s "in-house" audits. "They're all on the same team," said Evans's press secretary, Terry Mikelson, referring to the relationship between the Farm Credit Administration and the Farm Credit System.

There is also "circumstantial evidence" of the system's financial problems, Mikelson says, which F.C.S. officials have not admitted. "Why are their interest rates rising to 17 to 18 percent when their bonds are selling on Wall Street at T-bill rates?" he asks. "Why has it been necessary to close down about a dozen credit associations in recent months due to insolvency?" Mikelson adds that Evans has pieced together much of his information about the system's lending practices from case histories in his largely rural district. He suggests that the system's get-tough policy with borrowers stems from its own financial difficulties.

Mikelson related the case of a farmer now living in Iowa City who until a year ago was actively working his mother's land. "They were long-term borrowers but had been in arrears this last year. They were able to sell one of their farms to improve their cash flow statement, and were able to obtain a one-year grace period."

When that period was up, the Farm Credit System decided to foreclose and sell the land at a sheriff's auction. It was scheduled for 2 P.M. on a Friday. On Thursday night, the loan officer called the farmer and said he could still redeem the farm by bringing in $75,000 cash by 2 o'clock the next afternoon.

"He had three lines of credit but had to drive around to line them up and got a speeding ticket doing it," Mikelson said. "When he realized he would not make the deadline, he called his wife, who had their attorney relay a request to wait until he arrived." The lender refused, and the sale was over when the farmer finally got there, at 2:15. The only bidder was the creditor, and Representative Evans has been working with F.C.S. officials in the Omaha district to persuade them to reverse that action.

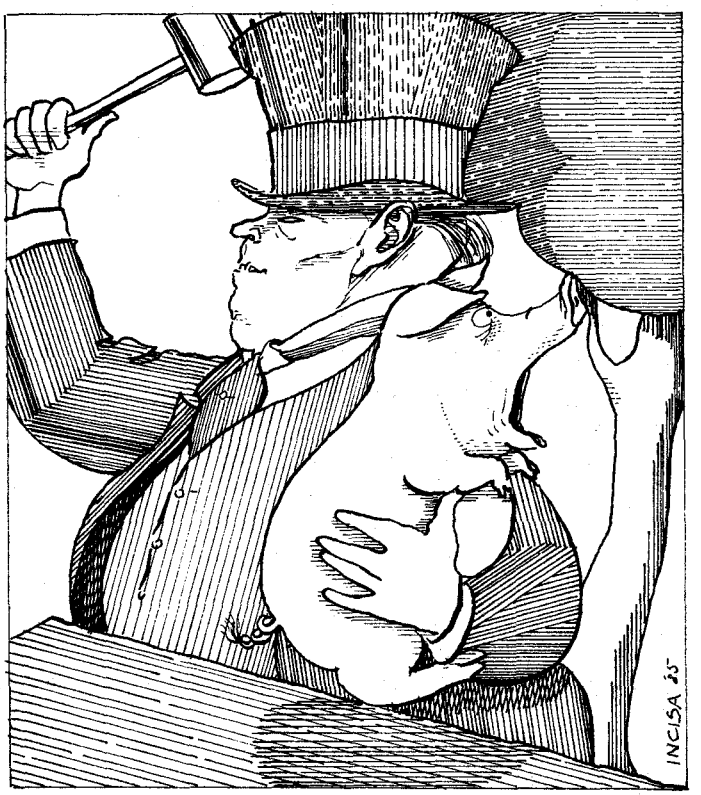
Recently farm credit officials have begun to admit that the system is in trouble. Testifying before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit and Rural Development, F.C.A. governor Donald Wilkinson endorsed a resolution calling for Federal measures to relieve lenders of the burden of carrying nonperforming agricultural loans (those on which they have given up hope of collecting further payments). The Farm Credit Council, an autonomous trade association of F.C.S. lenders, has since proposed setting up an Agricultural Conservation Corporation, which would buy up land from distressed farmers. Those properties would be removed from the market for up to five years, reducing the current glut of land on the market and checking the precipitous decline in values which has accelerated the wave of foreclosures.

In a more recent appearance before the subcommittee, Wilkinson stressed the need for Federal insurance to protect borrowers' equity in associations that go out of business, just as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation protects people's savings. He also asked for power to deal with problems at local associations before they get out of hand. Under the present system, he testified, "unsafe and imprudent practices, even if identified by F.C.A., cannot be remedied . . . until the practices result in insolvency."

Since September 1983, eleven local credit associations have collapsed. Thirty-nine others had to be merged with stronger associations because of financial difficulties. From 1981 to 1984, eleven of the twelve districts lost members; in several of them, the decline was more than 20 percent. In the Omaha district the F.I.C.B.'s loan volume dropped from $2.2 billion at the beginning of 1984 to $1.8 billion at the end of the year. Although Hanser says much of the loss is attributable to "paydowns" on loans by farmers who simply are not borrowing more, associations in the district also showed a membership decline of more than 10 percent that year. Some of those farmers have been forced out of business, and some, who are more secure borrowers, have drifted to lending institutions that offer lower interest rates.

Most observers consider it unlikely that Congress will allow the Farm Credit System to collapse. Investor confidence on Wall Street, where F.C.S. bonds are a popular investment vehicle, remains strong, buoyed by the expectation that Congress will step in if the system is in trouble. The cost, however, might be high, and President Reagan has already vetoed one farm credit measure this year.

The Farm Credit System has been a largely unnoticed fi-



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nancial giant for years, but it is increasingly unable to avoid the spotlight as the farm crisis intensifies. Right now, the farmers are suffering the most, and Perry Wilson Jr. spoke for many of them in Plattsburg this March:

> The people in this country have made the biggest mistake. They let George up there take care of their business. Let George do it, and we'll lose her right out from under our noses. Believe me, George ain't taking care of it up there right now. We're about to pay for it through the nose again. □

A LACK OF AMENITIES

The Health Threat In the Fields

HENRY WEINSTEIN

At his Senate confirmation hearings two weeks ago, Secretary of Labor William Brock fielded some rude questions on an impolite subject—toilet facilities. What prompted the queries was the announcement last month by Robert A. Rowland, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, that OSHA would not issue a rule requiring agricultural employers to provide field workers with toilets, drinking water and washing water, despite strong recommendations by public health experts and OSHA's own staff specialists that it do so.

At the hearing, Senator Howard Metzenbaum, who had called the decision "one of the most shameful ever made in the Department of Labor," urged Brock to overrule Rowland. Brock promised only that he would review the matter. But when Metzenbaum asked him if he thought agricultural workers need such facilities, Brock replied, "Yes I do."

Rowland's action was the latest setback for farm laborers who have been fighting thirteen years to obtain the same basic hygienic amenities that are guaranteed to other workers in this country. It touched off a storm of condemnations by unions and members of Congress.

Charles Horwitz, a staff attorney for the Migrant Legal Action Program in Washington, said the decision would be challenged in Federal court. He asserted that OSHA had acted in bad faith because it had ignored testimony presented during five public hearings last year and other information provided to the agency during an extended court battle over the field sanitation issue. "There was no medical or scientific testimony given against requiring drinking water, washing water and toilets," he said.

Indeed, last September, Dr. Eugene Gangarosa, a professor of public health at Atlanta's Emory University, told OSHA that because farm owners frequently refuse to provide their employees with sanitation facilities, workers suffer infection and disease at rates comparable to those in rural areas of the Third World. The rate of parasitic diseases among U.S. migrant workers, for example, is higher than that among Guatemalan children. Gangarosa, who reviewed all the testimony presented to the agency during the 1984 hearings, told OSHA that it showed a "compelling need" for adopting a field sanitation standard.

Gangarosa's analysis showed that compared with the general population, farm workers are seven to twenty-six times more likely to contract parasitic diseases; nine to eighty-five times more likely to suffer from diarrhea; three times more likely to suffer chemical exposures; and five times more likely to develop skin rashes—those last two because they are unable to wash off the pesticides that get on their skin. They are perhaps twice as likely to suffer from heat stress as are workers in other high-risk occupations. He told the agency that adopting field sanitation standards would dramatically reduce pesticide dangers and the incidence of intestinal diseases. He also warned that the poor state of hygiene on the farms creates health hazards for nearby communities and for consumers of fresh produce.

Today, field hands are the only American workers without a legal right to basic amenities. Thirty-seven states have no laws requiring agricultural employers to provide sanitation and washing facilities for their workers. Laws in thirteen states—including the big agricultural producers California, Florida and Texas—require varying degrees of field sanitation. California statutes, for example, call for toilets, washing water and drinking water. Some states require only drinking water; others, only toilets. And at the hearings last year, witnesses testified that the laws are spottily enforced. Juan Arambula of California Rural Legal Assistance said that in many places in his state the law is irrelevant because there are not enough health inspectors.

The magnitude of the problem was presented to OSHA last year in a study done for it by Centaur Associates, a Washington-based consulting firm. The study found that more than one-third of the farm workers in the nation have no access to toilets, one-fifth have no hand-washing facilities and more than half are not provided with drinking water. Horwitz asserted that even those figures are overly optimistic.

OSHA has resisted establishing a Federal field sanitation standard since 1972, when farm labor organizations first asked for one. The following year, a coalition of Hispanic organizations took the agency to court over the issue. The case bounced back and forth between the Federal District Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia until 1982, when OSHA promised to promulgate a field sanitation standard by early 1984.

On March 1 of last year, OSHA presented its proposal and solicited comments on it. The standard would require all agricultural employers with eleven or more workers to provide drinking water, hand-washing facilities and a toilet within a quarter-mile of every twenty employees.

According to Horwitz, the standard would apply to only about 530,000 farm workers; nearly 85 percent of the nation's farm laborers would be excluded because their employers have fewer than eleven workers. Nonetheless, he

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strongly favors its adoption, saying it holds the potential, with proper enforcement, to improve dramatically the health of those covered.

Ten days before he announced his decision, Rowland was questioned about the field sanitation standard by members of a subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and Labor, which oversees OSHA's operations. He acknowledged that the lack of field sanitation, "where it existed, was deplorable." But, he said, there is "no way to tell how widespread it is." Rowland admitted he had not read Gangarosa's report. What he did not tell the subcommittee was that he had ordered OSHA staff members to draft a rationale for not issuing the standard. Five of the seven members of OSHA's field sanitation team sent him a memorandum saying there was no excuse for inaction.

"We . . . must advise you, in our professional opinion, that the record will not support such a determination," they declared. They also warned Rowland that if OSHA decided not to adopt a standard or issued one that was watered down—an option under consideration at the time—it would "bring discredit to the agency and ourselves."

In announcing his decision, Rowland said farm health problems are not grave enough to merit Federal action and have been "traditionally and properly left to the states." Rowland did not mention the findings of OSHA's own experts. Instead, he brought up the extraneous question of chemical plant safety. "OSHA's resources are best utilized when OSHA sends inspectors to chemical plants and high-hazard locations where there are frequent and documented threats to life and limb," his statement read. "Field sanitation, though an important public health concern, generally does not involve that kind of lethal and irreversible occupational hazard."

Margaret Seminario, the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s associate director of occupational safety, health and social security, reacted angrily to Rowland's explanation. "That's just an excuse they're using not to take action to protect farm workers," she said. "The whole notion [that] someone has to die before OSHA will act is totally irresponsible."

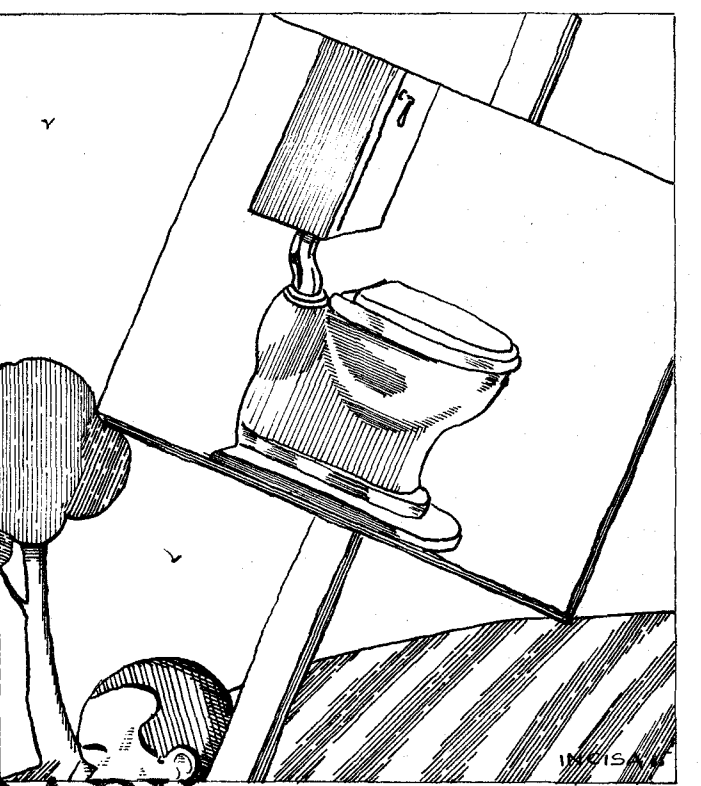
Union health and safety experts said they were surprised to hear of Rowland's sudden interest in plant safety, in view of OSHA's record. Just six days after he announced the decision, the Office of Technology Assessment, a nonpartisan arm of Congress, published a report critical of the agency. The office faulted OSHA for issuing few regulations to control hazards and for failing to update its health standards as new medical evidence reveals that certain substances are more dangerous than once believed. The study scored OSHA's "generally infrequent inspections and comparatively low penalty levels," which have "provided limited incentives for companies to comply with the standards."

Shortly after Rowland's decision was released, César Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers of America, raised questions about whether the OSHA chief had a conflict of interest on the sanitation issue. Chavez pointed out that Rowland is a substantial shareholder in Tenneco, the parent corporation of Tenneco West, a large California agribusiness firm. Federal disclosure reports show that Rowland owns $15,000 to $50,000 worth of Tenneco shares.

In September 1980, the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board ruled that Tenneco West had illegally fired twenty-five farm workers in 1979 after they had complained about being paid less than they were promised and about having no sanitary facilities. In March 1982, after the company appealed the ruling, Tenneco agreed out of court to pay $1,210 to each of the workers.

After Rowland became Assistant Secretary last year, he placed all his investments that might be affected by the agency's actions—including the Tenneco stock—in a blind trust. The arrangement was approved by the Office of Government Ethics. Among his other holdings, according to Federal records, are stocks in chemical giants Exxon and Monsanto and in the Manville Corporation, long the world's leading manufacturer of asbestos products. Last September, Raymond Donovan, then the Secretary of Labor, granted Rowland the right to make policy and rules in areas that could affect the companies whose stock he owned. Donovan said such decisions "wouldn't have a direct and predictable impact" on Rowland's holdings.

Whether Rowland has a conflict of interest is of no concern to most of the farm workers who have to live with his decision. But they have no doubts about the need for Federal action. Recently I visited some vegetable and citrus fields within an hour's drive of Phoenix. At one onion field a young Latino man told me workers avoided using the portable toilets because of their unsanitary condition. An examination of the men's facility revealed that a colony of flies had encamped on the edge of the seat and were feasting on its contents. Onion picker Maria Lerman complained she had been forced to use a filthy toilet while working in the fields during her pregnancy last year. "All we can do is ask the



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foreman, When are you going to clean the bathroom?" she said. "They treat us like animals."

Other workers I talked to, including some lettuce cutters standing outside a field that had no toilet nearby, seemed resigned to the situation. "We don't worry about it," said one of the men. "There are no women in our crew, so if we have to go, we just go where we are." Another remarked, "We're on a piece rate; we don't have time to stop."

For women, it's not so easy, however. Some medical studies indicate that they suffer increased bladder diseases as a result of having to hold their urine for long periods of time when no facilities are available. Francisca Carvazas of the Maricopa County Organizing Project, a migrant rights advocacy group in Arizona, said she can never forget the sight of her mother rushing into the house at the end of each day in the fields and heading straight for the bathroom.

As William Brock ponders how to handle his first major controversy as head of the Labor Department, he should contemplate an observation Dr. Gangarosa made in his report to OSHA last year. Pointing out that the United States is leading the effort in the United Nations to provide safe drinking water and toilet facilities for poor people all over the world by 1990, he asked, "How can we do less for our own?" □

LETTER FROM COPENHAGEN

Why Danes Think We're Crazy

ALAN WOLFE

Copenhagen

In 1961, when Congress passed the law establishing the Fulbright-Hays Program, which uses taxpayers' money to send U.S. scholars abroad and bring foreign scholars to the United States, it no doubt justified this untraditional flirtation with enlightenment on the ground that U.S. grantees would become unofficial ambassadors, explaining the American way of life to grateful listeners. During my year as Fulbright Professor of American Studies at the University of Copenhagen, I have done a great deal of explaining, although not quite the sort that Congress had in mind.

The United States, so recently gripped by doubt and guilt, is now brimming with self-assertiveness. When Americans think about the rest of the world at all, they assume that their prosperous economy is the envy of recession-burdened lands, whose governments would (if the unions would let them) abolish the welfare state to foster business expansion and create jobs. They have a dim awareness that some European countries are not eager to accept American nuclear weapons, but they believe that someday those nations will come to their senses and be grateful to the United States for standing resolute in the face of the Soviet threat. Even the French, who have long been more hostile toward the United States than any other European nation, are now believed to be falling all over themselves in a rush to emulate the American model.

I cannot speak for the French, although nothing the faddish intellectuals there believe would surprise me. But I can speak for the Danes—for the editorial writers I read, the television commentators I watch, the students I teach and the various people I talk to. They are fascinated by America, in awe of its energy, attracted to its culture. But they also fear it, and I have sensed that fear growing stronger in the eight years I have been coming here. The peculiarities of American politics, once regarded as amusing, are no longer a laughing matter.

Admittedly, Denmark is not the best place to obtain a picture of America from abroad. Small, homogenous, peaceful and close-knit, Denmark is proud of what its Queen, in her annual New Year's Eve address, called "our little paradise." That pride, which turns easily into smugness, xenophobia and conformity, sometimes produces a naïve, holier-than-thou anti-Americanism. Still, Danes have created a society that works, so their views on the United States are worth listening to.

The Danes do not find it peculiar that the United States has a conservative President; their head of state is also conservative. Nor are they surprised by America's large deficits, taxpayer revolts and high interest rates, all of which are problems here. The aspects of America that cause wonderment are not what we do, but how we do it.

Why, I am frequently asked, do workers vote for a President so identified with the interests of big corporations? Why, my students recently wanted to know, do so many farmers support Reagan although he clearly believes the family farm is an anachronism? I have yet to meet a Dane who understands how Americans can want to increase defense spending but be unwilling to tax themselves for it. Nor can anyone figure out why a country so anxious to act like a world power and so ready to intervene wherever it can is so ignorant of the countries it would control. Such questions, often thrown at me so rapidly I cannot formulate a reply, are inevitably followed by a long pause, and then by the question that underlies all the others: Are Americans dumb?

I can understand why people here might think so. It is difficult to explain why so many people who voted for Reagan express surprise or shock at his programs. One can only nod in agreement when Danes point out how little most Americans know about other countries—let alone their own. (My Danish students know more American history than my American students). Still, reluctant to admit that we are all that stupid, I search for an alternative explanation.

Americans, I tell my interrogators, are neither better nor worse than other people; they are just different. The chief difference, the one that accounts for the peculiarities of U.S. politics, is that while in many countries the social order has been deliberately constructed, in America the existence

Alan Wolfe is a member of The Nation*'s editorial board. An expanded version of his* The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Threat *was published last year by South End Press.*

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of a society has always been taken for granted. Americans believe that an invisible hand will harmonize individual efforts, so they need not concern themselves with the consequences of their actions. A people believing this may have a vigorous economy but will lack a society. Adam Smith, the great exponent of the marketplace, was an economic genius but not a social theorist. To him, and to those who live by his creed, society is a fiction at best, an encumbrance at worst. The American experiment created a government and a political system without first creating a society.

A social order exists when individuals recognize that their private actions affect other people. A more complex society moves beyond that recognition, making an effort to plan and direct those actions toward a collective goal. The difference between an economy and a society is that the latter makes a conscious effort to deal in some way with the consequences of individual choices, while the former leaves such consequences to indirect and unanticipated developments.

Denmark has a strong social order. To be a Dane means to assume responsibility for the living conditions one shares with others. I don't mean to romanticize: Danes avoid taxes when they can, are upset about immigration and are sometimes racist. They can be rude in crowds and on buses; sometimes they riot and break shop windows. Still, few Danes believe they are, in Herman Melville's phrase, isolatos.

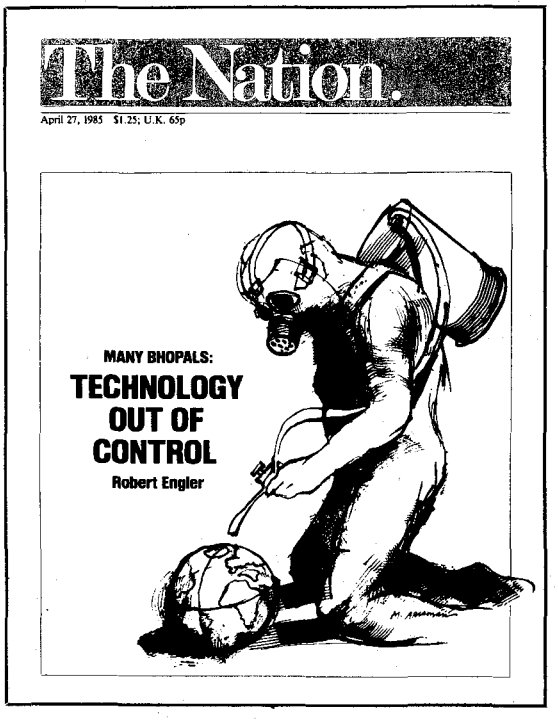
There is big government in this country, so big it hurts. Danes earning roughly the same as I do pay about 55 percent of their income in taxes, not including the 22 percent value-added tax on all consumer goods they buy. The Danish state is sometimes intrusive and always bureaucratic. Yet it is not primarily the state that keeps order but the self-discipline of its citizens. Many people feel that self-discipline is breaking down, but it is impressive to an American individualist.

Where there is a strong society, there need not be a strong state. If one believes, as I do, that the marketplace is an imperfect mechanism for coordinating human efforts, it follows that a strong and repressive state is needed when the market breaks down. Americans believe in individual freedom, but they also believe in the need for strong police power. Danes, by contrast, do not worship individualism and distrust the policing authority of the state.

There is nothing altruistic about the Danes' respect for society. It is simply a form of self-interest. The late British economist Fred Hirsch illustrated this point with the metaphor of a crowd at a sporting event. One person, who wants to see better than everyone else, stands up. For a moment, he has a clearer view. Then someone behind him stands, then someone else, until everyone is standing. Now each spectator is in the same position relative to everyone else that he was in at the start—just less comfortable. Moral: If one person acts out of narrow self-interest, the freedom of all is eventually threatened.

If one applies to politics the idea that the consequences of people's behavior will be regulated by the market, the result is Ronald Reagan's America, where it makes perfect sense to raise the military budget while cutting taxes. Somehow

MANY BHOPALS
TECHNOLOGY
OUT OF CONTROL



Robert Engler examines the dangers of an agricultural technology under the control of an irresponsible scientific-corporate elite in the April 27 issue of The Nation.

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the deficits will go away. Where good consumers buy whatever they want, regardless of need, voting for a man because his voice is soothing and his manner pleasing is as rational, or irrational, as anything else.

No, I tell my questioners, Americans are not dumb. They simply live politically the way they think economically. They have an installment-plan theory of the state: buy now, someone else will pay later. Most Americans believe that the social order will take care of itself. It never occurs to them to help build it.

The way Americans conduct their affairs is regarded in this part of the world with awe. But now that what happens in Washington affects so profoundly what happens in Copenhagen, curiosity is being replaced by hostility. Danes are worried that they will have to make the payments.

Despite having one of the strongest economies in Europe, Denmark is being hurt in many ways by the overvalued dollar. True, expensive dollars make it possible to sell more furniture and beer to the United States, but export advantages pale beside the fact that oil is priced in dollars, and Denmark imports a lot of oil. But it is not the high dollar that bothers the Danes so much as Washington's refusal, on principle, to regulate its value. There is little cowboy capitalism here. Business tends to be conducted by well-established firms doing things in predictable ways. The ups and downs of the dollar make everyone a speculator. No company can make prudent decisions for the future. Let Americans run their economy like riverboat gamblers, Danes say, but don't force us to do the same.

Similarly, Danes of all political persuasions dislike recent moves to build up the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's nuclear arsenal. Located close to Poland and the Soviet Union, Denmark has little sympathy for Soviet-style communism. But it has also experienced aggression, having been occupied by the Nazis during World War II. It knows that social solidarity and pride in one's responsibility to others will better defend its way of life than passive reliance on remote-control weapons. When people put their faith in bombs, they lose faith in themselves. Washington's insistence that its European allies abandon their domestic consensus in favor of sharing the latest in Star Wars technology has made neutrality popular once again.

Far from winning respect for its firmness toward the Soviet threat and its wave of economic expansion, the United States has alienated many people in this small country, including those who have traditionally respected American accomplishments. From an economic and strategic perspective, that hardly matters. The United States would feel not a ripple if the 5 million Danes withdrew from NATO (a course advocated by very few here) or declared a boycott of American goods. The attitudes I have been describing would be laughed at in the hardball world of Washington today.

Yet there once was a time, perhaps when the Fulbright-Hays Program was established, when opinions abroad mattered, especially the opinions of those few countries that spoke with moral force. Denmark, so unimportant in strategic terms, remains significant to all those who believe that there still exists a role for conscience in politics. For that reason, it has been an important experience to be here—to learn, more than to teach. □

South Africa

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

Namibia has been dragged from its periodic oblivion in world politics to center stage in recent weeks. On April 18, South African President P.W. Botha formally declared his intention to establish a new government in Namibia composed of a number of so-called internal parties. There are few surprises in Namibia these days, and that move was not one of them. Since the creation of the Multi-Party Conference in late 1983, political figures in Namibia have anticipated that those parties, widely accused of being puppets of the South African government, would be recognized by Pretoria in order to thwart attempts at achieving internationally sanctioned independence in the territory. Among those who claimed surprise, however, were the Americans, for whom the unilateral decision by Pretoria represented a dramatic rejection of the Reagan Administration's policy of "constructive engagement" in South Africa, one of whose ostensible goals was independence for Namibia.

Namibians expected that constructive engagement would fail to produce the promised results. Independence for Namibia has never been one of the Reagan Administration's central concerns. U.S. policies follow in the tradition of foreign exploitation of Namibia, picking up the pieces of a tragedy that began in the nineteenth century, when Germany and Great Britain vied for the territory known as South West Africa. Germany controlled most of the area until after World War I, when South Africa acquired it under a League of Nations mandate. Pretoria has ruled the country ever since, in defiance of U.N. resolutions revoking its mandate and calling on it to end its "illegal occupation." In 1978 the Security Council passed Resolution 435, which called for free elections under U.N. supervision and the creation of a peacekeeping force to oversee the withdrawal of the S.A.D.F. and the guerrilla fighters of the Namibian liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo). Although Pretoria agreed to the resolution, it continued to stall. Nevertheless, independence seemed close at hand.

The election of Ronald Reagan shattered those hopes. With a friendly American President in office, South Africa was in no hurry to relinquish its prized possession. In January 1981, its representatives walked out of the Geneva talks on the implementation of Resolution 435.

The Reagan Administration moved quickly to establish closer ties with Pretoria. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, a conservative specialist

David L. Goodman is a freelance journalist based in Boston. He recently spent four months in southern Africa, including three weeks in Namibia.

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on Africa from Georgetown University, announced the policy of constructive engagement. It relaxed export controls to permit sales of equipment to the South African military and police, encouraged trade between the two countries, provided greater opportunities for investment and loans to South Africa, increased the number of military attachés each country sends to the other and opened additional South African consulates in the United States. Crocker proclaimed that the policy would also achieve Namibian independence, force Pretoria to relax its apartheid policies and bolster regional security.

But constructive engagement placed a large stumbling block in the way of Resolution 435: Washington insisted that independence for Namibia be linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from neighboring Angola. Even the South Africans, who are masters at stalling, had to be impressed by that maneuver. The "contact group" of diplomats from Great Britain, France, Canada, West Germany and the United States, which was negotiating with the South Africans on behalf of the United Nations, was eased out of the picture, and the fate of Namibia is now being decided by Washington and Pretoria.

Washington's support for Pretoria has made the minority regime bolder in its dealings with the occupied territory. In the north of the country, where the majority of black Namibians live, cars share the road with S.A.D.F. convoys. Military roadblocks and checkpoints are set up at a soldier's whim; it is not uncommon to be stopped by gun-toting troops of the notorious counterinsurgency unit Koevoet (Afrikaans for "crowbar"). If the occupants of the car are white, they may be let off after being asked for a cigarette. If they are black, they are subjected to repeated searches and interrogations.

On March 11, South Africa announced that the entire northern border region of Namibia would become a "security zone," with access allowed only to those who have a police permit. That will give the occupying troops a freer hand in their dealings with the native people and will place severe restrictions on church workers, journalists and local residents.

The S.A.D.F. justifies its callous treatment of black Namibians by claiming it is looking for guerrillas. In the liberation war Swapo has been fighting against South Africa since 1966, 10,000 Namibians—1 percent of the population—have been killed and more than 100,000 have fled the country. Although hundreds, possibly thousands, of South African soldiers have been killed, the government is deeply committed to this unwinnable war, currently deploying an estimated 100,000 troops in the territory. South Africa claims it is spending $900 million a year on "infrastructure and defense" in Namibia, while Swapo insists the figure is closer to $1.5 billion. Estimates on what the war costs South Africa range from $1.6 million to $4.8 million a day.

Measured against its proclaimed goals, constructive engagement has been a resounding failure. State violence in South Africa increased dramatically in the past eight months; regional security has continued to deteriorate due to South Africa-backed insurgencies in the frontline states; and despite the objection of the Reagan Administration, Namibia has been subjugated to the authority of Pretoria's puppet government. But the public objectives of constructive engagement tell only part of the story of why the United States is so interested in Namibia. There is another agenda being served well.

The Reagan Administration's strategic and economic interests in Namibia converge with the South African regime's. Both governments want the territory to serve as a buffer state against guerrilla activity by the African National Congress (A.N.C.) and against hostile neighbors to the north. Defense Minister Gen. Magnus Malan has stated that a South African withdrawal from Namibia would "shift the operational area from the Cunene River in southern Angola to the Orange River," on South Africa's northwestern border. Chester Crocker has sounded a similar warning. In 1980, he wrote that the United States must support "evolutionary change as distinguished from revolutionary cataclysm."

Namibia is also of crucial economic importance to both countries. The territory contains vast natural resources, including the world's largest open-pit uranium mine, the world's largest supply of raw diamonds, and extensive zinc, copper and tin deposits. Two multinational corporations, Consolidated Diamond Mines of South Africa and the U.S.-based Tsumeb Corporation, control more than 90 percent of all mining operations in Namibia. Multinationals skim off an estimated one-third to one-half of Namibia's gross national product.

In the small town of Tsumeb, perched on the edge of the so-called operational area, or war zone, of northern Namibia, the corporate presence is abundantly in evidence. The town is an oasis of suburban life in the midst of the harsh Namibian landscape. Towering above it is the Tsumeb copper mine. Today, fewer workers pour through the rusty mine gates than ten years ago. The mine, which is owned jointly by the Newmont Mining Corporation and American Metal Climax (AMAX), both U.S.-based, has been slowly but steadily sucked dry. Between 1966 and 1981, total ore output from Tsumeb dropped by almost one-third, and the copper content of the ore has dropped by 62 percent since the mine opened in 1947. Those statistics lend credence to Namibians' fear that the multinationals are trying to extract as much of the territory's natural resources as they can before majority rule comes. The foreign concerns are operating in defiance of a 1974 U.N. decree which declared that "no animal resource, mineral, or other natural resource produced in . . . Namibia may be taken from the said Territory . . . without the consent and permission of the United Nations Council for Namibia. This efficient plunder assures the corporations' and the U.S. government's continuing involvement in the country. It has been championed by Crocker, who has written about "the need to retain and expand U.S. and Western access to a reliable supply of imported minerals [from southern Africa] at reasonable prices."

In geopolitical terms, the Administration's policy rep-

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resents an attempt to bolster America's position in what it sees as the struggle against the Soviet Union for control of the African continent, particularly southern Africa. Having failed to stem the rise to power of socialist governments in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe between 1975 and 1980, State Department cold warriors see in Namibia an opportunity to restore Western influence in the region. They hope the expulsion of Cuban soldiers from Angola will force that country's President, José Eduardo dos Santos, to reach a settlement with the pro-Western, South Africa-backed guerrilla movement Unita, headed by Jonas Savimbi. The overall strategy is to neutralize the socialist governments in Angola and Mozambique by supporting proxy forces waging destabilization campaigns. The impact of a progressive Swapo government in Namibia, which South African intelligence concedes would follow if free and fair elections were held in the territory, would then be offset by a less hospitable political climate in the region. It would also insure that support for guerrillas of the A.N.C. could not easily be provided from rear bases in countries bordering on South Africa.

Thus the motive behind constructive engagement has little to do with inducing the Pretoria regime to make reforms or with winning Namibian independence. It is a policy of regional containment, aimed at keeping southern Africa, and ultimately the entire continent, free of anticapitalist influences. Reagan is determined not to allow an outpost of capitalism to be lost merely because of the aspirations for independence of a sparsely populated African country.

Namibians are the discounted party in the U.S. strategy. Their suffering continues unabated, and S.A.D.F. atrocities against civilians—documented by the Council of Churches in Namibia, Amnesty International, Swapo and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference—continue to mount. Even in remote parts of the northern war zone, illiterate villagers will ask an American why his country is opposed to Namibian independence. Many Namibians see the United States as an ally of Pretoria, and that is why constructive engagement will backfire. As Anton Lubowsky, a white Windhoek attorney who is a member of Swapo, remarked: "The U.S. has a choice in Namibia of aligning itself with the past, which is South Africa, or with the future, which is Swapo. Once again, it appears to have sided with the past."

And so, as American and South African officials scramble to kill time before granting Namibia independence, the daily horrors of the South African occupation go on. As Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, a Lutheran leader in the northern part of the country, concluded bitterly after last November's U.S. elections, "The re-election of your President is the re-election of our suffering." □

LETTERS.

(*Continued From Page 546*)
leadership's collaboration with the rightist Coordinadora's boycott of the elections. They were virulently anti-Sandinista but they felt that collaboration with the coalition was not in the best interest of their union. Sharp debate yes, *turbas* no.

There are many conflicting signals about Nicaragua's future emanating from that country. But the key players in the evolution of that future are the Nicaraguan people. While it may not be crystal clear where the Sandinistas would like to go, there is no doubt whatsoever where Reagan's *contras* would take Nicaragua. Under the Sandinistas the people will continue to have input. Under the *contras* the United States would have the input. *Eric Weaver*

GANDHI ON NICARAGUA

Wheaton, Ill.
Many years ago, I heard a story concerning India's fight for freedom that I find very appropriate to the fracas *The Nation* has kicked up about Nicaragua.

The late Harold Lasky, at that time an economics professor at London University, was interviewing Mahatma Gandhi. He asked him, "When will there be peace in India?" Gandhi replied, "When the British leave India." Lasky said, "But then there will be civil war!" "Ah," said Gandhi, "but it will be *our* civil war." *Mary K. Dowse*

MASSING REPLIES

New York City
James E. Keenan's letter is a morass. First we are told that my discussion of the factions in the F.S.L.N. is nothing new. Then my description of those factions is dismissed as "Kalbian" nonsense. Keenan then shifts again, asking what is so surprising about sharp debate in the F.S.L.N. I'm at a loss to follow the logic of this. The existence of debate among the Sandinistas is widely known and discussed in Nicaragua. I'm surprised that Keenan could spend time there without picking up on such a fundamental reality. Now that really does sound like the Kalbs.

As for "participatory democracy," Keenan is fuzzy-headed in the extreme. Which organizations is he referring to? To take an example, the Sandinista Defense Committees do promote participation; they also facilitate government control. The key question is how these two functions interact. Empty references to "vitality" and "accountability" do little to advance our understanding.

Keenan wonders about my reference to "some on the left." His own letter captures the mind-set I'm referring to. It brushes off discussions of freedom versus equality with woolly references to Donald Trump and Bernhard Goetz. And it responds to analysis of spheres of influence with silly clichés like "dying on our feet." Never mind that the Sandinistas themselves have come around to their own version of Finlandization; invoke "Vietnamization" and you've shown what a good revolutionary you can be.

Michael Massing

AMPLIFICATION

In an article in last week's issue, ("Reagan Packs the Federal Judiciary"), Herman Schwartz cited several questions submitted to Joseph Rodriguez, a nominee for the New Jersey Federal Bench, by Senators Orrin Hatch, Jeremiah Denton and John East. The full eight-page questionnaire is available from the Judicial Selection Project, 600 New Jersey Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20002. The project monitors the judicial selection process and judicial nominees.

The Nation welcomes letters—typed, double spaced and no longer than 300 words, please. Longer letters may be edited for reasons of space. Our policy is to publish as many letters as space permits, but inevitably a backlog develops, so please bear with us.

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Central America
Appearing just after the controversial Kissinger report in January 1984, the special issue on Central America offered a strong refutation of the Administration's views. The arguments still hold. Highlighted by Walter LaFeber's overview, William LeoGrande's analysis of the domestic political fallout and Peter Davis's compelling firsthand report on the Nicaraguan revolution today, the issue is one of the most urgent, informative and important in *The Nation*'s history.

Fifteen Years of the Burger Court
Herman Schwartz and his cadre of twelve leading lawyers and scholars put together an invaluable assessment of the Burger Court. Leaving no stone unturned, the authors scrutinize the last fifteen years of "intense judicial activism" in a thought-provoking manner. No lawyer, student of the courts or concerned citizen should be without this issue.

K.A.L. 007: What the U.S. Knew And When We Knew It
Published on the eve of the first anniversary of the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, this issue raises serious questions about the U.S. role in the tragedy. After a year of thorough research, author David Pearson concludes that U.S. authorities at the highest level knew the airliner was off course much earlier than they have admitted, and that the questions raised by the official versions of the story can only be resolved by a Congressional inquiry.

The Strange Correspondence of Morris Ernst & John Edgar Hoover, 1939–1964
Harrison E. Salisbury, the award-winning journalist, details how the director of the F.B.I. exploited and debased the confidence of a leading civil libertarian, and in so doing seriously compromised the A.C.L.U. Salisbury draws on some 300 exchanges to document the extent to which the machinations of the "top constable" profaned the democratic process.

Latin America: A Political Guide
An invaluable survey of thirty-three Latin American countries by Penny Lernoux, *The Nation*'s award-winning Latin American correspondent.

El Salvador
A compilation of *Nation* articles on Central America and El Salvador, including an early debunking of the famed "White Paper" by James Petras.

A Letter to America
The Nation January Inauguration issue was devoted entirely to E.P. Thompson's compelling essay on the clear and present danger of nuclear war.

Intervention
Under what conditions, if any, is military (or other) intervention ever justified? An entire issue of *The Nation* on the subject of intervention contains the papers presented at a Conference on Intervention, co-sponsored by *The Nation* and the Columbia University School of International Affairs.

The Campaign to Smear the Nuclear Freeze Movement
Frank Donner offers a provocative analysis and thorough documentation of the outrageous attempts by right wingers in media, Congress and the Administration to discredit the nuclear freeze movement, charging that it is inspired and manipulated by the Soviet Union.

Nuclear Samizdat
What do Russians think about the nuclear arms race? Two prominent Marxist dissidents, historian Roy A. Medvedev and biologist Zhores A. Medvedev, provide the unofficial viewpoint with a clarity rarely found in the American press.

Disarmament: Covering the Unthinkable
In this special issue Richard Pollak takes a critical look at the media coverage of the indisputably most important issue facing mankind; Michael Kazin gives a brief history of the birth of the freeze movement; and David Corn presents a useful directory of organizations working on the disarmament issue.

The New Arms Technology
From the catapult to particle beam weapons, the engineering of death has concentrated more attention and resources than any other human endeavor. Nine leading experts explore and explain the latest arms technology—both "conventional" and nuclear—and trace the political decisions which have led us closer to Armageddon than ever before.

Empire as a Way of Life
William Appleman Williams' brilliant analysis of America's life with an empire—and the implications of life without one—was the focus of this special issue that was distributed to the delegates at the 1980 Democratic National Convention.

Myths of the Middle East
This special issue of *The Nation* is devoted to breaking the logomachy jam in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by subjecting the emotion-sodden rhetoric that weighs down current thinking to a blast of fresh ideas.

Many Bhopals: Technology Out of Control
Robert Engler reveals that the dangerous dependence on pesticides and the movement away from people-intensive agriculture results from corporate profit-making strategies. In addition, he shows that the Bhopal disaster is one of countless poisonings occurring each year, here and in the Third World, under an irresponsible scientific-corporate elite.

Beyond Westmoreland: The Right's Attack on the Press
How does the Westmoreland case fit into the New Right's strategy to curtail the independence of the press? Walter Schneir and Miriam Schneir answer this question and provide an overview of the New Right's campaign against the media.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Prizewinning Poets—1985

*The Winners of "Discovery"—*The Nation, *'85" are Richard Foerster, Mary McArthur, Jennifer Rose and Lisa Ann Turner. They will read their poems on Monday, May 6, at 8 P.M., at The Poetry Center, 92nd Street YM-YWHA in New York City. The contest was judged by Nicholas Christopher, William Matthews and Molly Peacock. Now in its eleventh year, the competition combines The Poetry Center's "Discovery" contest and* The Nation*'s poetry prize. It is open to poets who have not published in book form.* —*Grace Schulman, Poetry Editor*

RINGING THE CHANGES

Plain hunting, treble bob, grandsire—
One upon the next, the whole bronze choir

Tumble through the permutations
With insidious logic, no theme

But change, and nothing to assuage
The on-rushed calligraphic stream

Along the border of the page.
It's algebra's emotion, sums

Of sound piled layer by layer
Atop these stones and mumbled prayers.

The last tone lingers, fades like love
Or memory of love reproved

By ravenous silence, the state
Of dissolution to which all

Works come. Where is the melody,
The revolutionary phrase scrawled

Across the mind's altar, the debris
We pick through to reorchestrate

Lost symphonies? The church is still.
I sit, poised like a bell, and peer

Through the terrible gaping O
Of the soul's circumference, toward fear,

Or its reflection, far below.
Inside, a peal begins to spill:

Change. Change. Change. The pattern grows unique
As forged shapes swing skyward—and speak.

Richard Foerster

JANE ADDAMS' DREAM OF A WHEEL

When I was a child I dreamt
the earth chimed one last time then
ground to a stop like a big clock.
Not even a breath of wind
ruffled the fur of my rabbit
that lay like a stone in the hutch.
My brother's horses stood motionless
where he had tied them to the gate.
My father's glass of medicine left by the bed;
my mother's cup of tea cold upon the sill.
At one moment all hearts on earth
had ceased to beat, but mine.
I alone remained alive
with the knowledge that
nothing could begin again
until one wagon wheel was made.

I always found myself
in the blacksmith's shop.
A fire glowed upon the forge.
The anvil waited by the door.
A delicate girl, I struggled
to lift the hammer.
I had to hurry before the world,
stopped for too long,
shattered into stars.

What did the village blacksmith think
when I appeared sleepy in his doorway.
"Must you sizzle the iron in the water?" I asked him.
"Sure," he'd reply, "to make the iron hard."
I would sigh and walk away,
confiding in no one my dream of a wheel,
to mysterious to be shared
and too heavy to be borne alone.

Mary McArthur

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EASTHAM SONNETS

1

Fishermen drag in the tide. Their reels sound
like gulls. Clam-diggers forsake their spit of muck
for the cold sand where you and I walk
barefoot, against the flag-flapping wind.
Do they guess this is a "romantic weekend"
for us or do they think two women cannot ache
that way? You will not take my hand in public,
afraid of the fishermen's reprimand.
I think this fear in you is what disturbs
me most, this desire for us to act like fugitives.
The hermit crab teaches you a lesson
not meant for us. Love, why must you listen?
All around us lies the wreckage of lives,
shells abandoned like poisoned suburbs.

2

Enameled crabs are strewn in brittle
constellations on the beach. The bleached clams
are dented moons. Their astrology is subtle,
every planet makes a tidal claim.
I wonder as we walk which one you will choose.
Gulls' prints decorate the wet flat in hieroglyphs
that look like birds themselves, fifth-grade arrows
chasing the clouds. We follow their path as if
at the end we, too, might take flight. Thirteen
summers ago I rescued a gull here
which died on the way to the Audubon station.
I made love with a boy on these dunes. The shore
is a palimpsest of loss; nothing resists synthesis.
But the sea has no pity for the sacrifice.

3

Sea grass rattles in the dunes, silver,
overexposed, a drained monochrome.
It gathers the sand in its hairy weir
with a gray grasp. My claim to you is the same
tentative clasping. Wellfleet's foghorn booms
an elegy over the filled-in bay.
Dusk shuts its blue shutters against the storm.
Tonight perhaps the tide will be high
enough to wash the beached slum of sea trash away
from the house, to set free the loosened buoy
of memory. You are my only buoy now.
The sea imposes its restless curfew
on us. Gulls patrol the shore. The beach house
harbors our nervous exile. Waves lap at the grass.

4

Light the color of white wine pours out
of the neighbors' window. Ringing the bay
are smaller lights, sweet bells. The target
ship disappears into indigo.
It has been anchored in the bay ever
since I can remember, a porous reef
of shelled metal. One summer, still during the war,
my uncle rowed me to it in his skiff
when the bomber squads weren't practicing.
Light flickered like minnows in its cavities
while the sea completed the bombers' instructions.
War and the sea have settled so many destinies.
I am thinking now of the soldiers rescued at
Dunkirk and how rarely love sends its boats out like that.

5

Morning. The sand is snow again, a white carpet
that needs vacuuming. The tide has waned,
soon the clam-diggers will return with their buckets
and hip-high boots. The sea sounds moccasinned.
Gulls reel above you as you try to find
some suitable memento to take home
among the broken necklaces of shells and
strands of seaweed jumbled like cheerleaders' pom-poms.
Now you bring me the casing of a razor clam,
the sea's slim switchblade, though you fail
to notice its blunt symbolism.
O how I envy the grip of the barnacle,
impervious to the tide's commute;
how I envy the handsome fisherman his net.

Jennifer Rose

CHEEK BITER

I'm nine years old, weighing the value
of a single well versus five skimmers,
preface to the dream in which my mother
throws me into an acid vat, my cheek

already half-gnawed to air, half carrion
of whispers. *Those are spirits*, she says,
you'll never speak to or from again.
My father looks in, switches the light off.

Its trailers circle the dark and dissolve
the way I've seen his even stitches
over soothless sockets flood red.
Nothing could stop it. Not skill, not love.

Like two long notes at low speed played
over and over, my mother's voice bounces
off the walls. If only this time my tongue
can force itself to draw her name,

maybe she'll turn kind and toss a rope.
I could have settled for bull dog terriers,
lamppost shadows—what other kids encounter
on the street and hope won't follow them home.

But in my father's office, when I watched
him slash a woman's swollen cheeks, and run
a rubber strip clear through, when her infection
spouted, her abscess finally purged, when he showed

what goes into bringing things out,
I knew why they say *blood* with *sacred*,
believed I could lie here, unashamed,
and sanctify every tooth in my mouth.

Lisa Ann Turner

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FILMS.

ANDREW KOPKIND

Mask
Desperately Seeking Susan

Years ago, in a galaxy too close to home, I asked a Hollywood television producer about the actress Cher. Except she wasn't much of an actress then: just a billion-dollar baby on the Las Vegas circuit and the abandoned half of the hilarious Sonny and Cher team. The producer swirled his insouciant little Napa Valley Chardonnay, lifted his head carefully so that his neck jewelry would not chime an accompaniment to his reply and presented a classic Hollywood sneer. "She's *soooo* dumb," he said, "she thinks Mount Rushmore is a natural phenomenon."

Well, the producer went on to a big network job in New York and, last I heard, got lost in the inevitable shuffle. Cher, of course, is one of the hottest movie stars around. And *soooo* smart. She has created a new American woman so utterly offbeat that none of the starlets of the 1970s can touch her. At once Cher sets herself apart from the indistinguishable pack of Nancy Allens, Karen Allens, Brooke Adamses, Debra Wingers and Sigourney Weavers (aren't there at least two of each?) who have banked their careers on that infrequent slot opposite Harrison Ford or Richard Gere. Cher has fashioned a film persona that fits an entirely different type. In Robert Altman's marvelous (and mislaid) *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, in Mike Nichols's *Silkwood* and now in Peter Bogdanovich's *Mask*, she plays opposite no one but the shiny world of success, convention and conformity. In the sociological jargon of the 1950s, she is inner-directed to the max: the lesbian loner in *Silkwood*, the Texas tart in *Jimmy Dean*, the motorcycle mom in *Mask*, all take their cues from a woman's strong sense of self rather than from the approval of others or the prompting of men.

In *Mask*, Cher is once again on the outside track of her generation, the dark side of Yuppiedom, the ass-end of the new femininity. Her Rusty Dennis is a runaway from a middle-class Jewish home in Chicago, parked in a biker commune in the anomic eastern reaches of the Los Angeles basin. She takes every drug she can lay her hands on, sleeps with every stud on a chopper and lives off welfare and the unkindness of strangers. But as Fernando Lamas used to say, *she knows exactly who she is*: the mother of a grotesquely disfigured, and terminally afflicted, young son. She is fiercely supportive but not doting; she is ready to belt a patronizing principal who wants to turn the boy away from junior high school, and she hires a hooker when the lad longs for love that the pretty girls in his class cannot offer. But her support is balanced against her own needs, and her son finds his own awesome strength in his mother's unyielding grasp on life.

There are moments of shameless sentimentality, and Bogdanovich goes overboard in making the biker world sympathetic and even charming. A friend of mine thought the scenes between Rusty and the leather guys were so coy the whole picture seemed like an alienated update of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. But as a movie about nonconformity—another 1950s theme that is due for reprise—*Mask* is honest and optimistic. And it marks Cher as the leading *refusenik* in the tyranny of glamour. She's come a long way from "Half Breed."

Desperately Seeking Susan has a different spin and spirit from *Mask*. Susan Seidelman's funky farce is grainy, witty and slapdash, where Bogdanovich's expert melodrama is shiny and serious. *Susan*'s setting in New York's East Village is just about as far as you can fly from the tract houses of L.A. Yet the two films are connected in consciousness, or at least they seem to grow out of similar visions of women in the American 1980s.

Susan (Madonna) is a post-punk layabout living in the material world, holing up with anonymous numbers in expensive hotels, dressing Danceteria-style in costumes so bizarre they make Cher's leathers look like Chanel suits. Roberta (Rosanna Arquette) is her mirror image: a Best & Co. bride of the New Jersey suburbs who pines for romance, danger and adventure across the river. Through the mechanisms of an outrageously contrived plot that involves amnesia, mistaken identity and impossible coincidences, Roberta becomes Susan, and gets as much as she pined for.

Like *Mask*, *Susan* puts extremely risky business in classic Hollywood forms. Leora Barish's script contains all the ritual elements of farce, even to the obligatory climax when all the significant characters arrive in the same room to sort out the confusion of the previous hour and a half. But in this case the room is not a lavish drawing room or a grand hotel but the garish confines of a seedy nightclub, and the confusion seems only about to begin. Roberta does not go back to her loving husband, the hot-tub salesman from Fort Lee, but stays with the loft bum she was living with as Susan. Neither she nor Madonna is redirected to a conventional existence, which is the way farces usually end. For the women here—like Rusty Dennis—are resourceful, competent and somehow savvy despite their ditsy days and silly turns. The men chase after them, but they never surrender: they choose their partners. *Susan* is not a feminist film, but it is unmistakably a woman's-eye view of postmodern culture as it unfolds over the borderline of respectability and convention, where deadly games are played as farce and every face you see on the street is a mask. □

THEATER.

PAUL BERMAN

An Enemy of the People
The Normal Heart
As Is

"I have been more the poet and less the social philosopher than has been believed." Ibsen meant by this famous remark that he was interested in the rights of women and other sundries of social philosophy; but he was more interested in character. That explains his habit of constructing a philosophical position in one play and deconstructing it in the next. In *The Pillars of the Community* he showed the dangers of living a lie, and in *The Wild Duck* he showed the dangers of living the truth. Sometimes he constructed and deconstructed in the same play. Isn't that the singular virtue of *An Enemy of the People*? Dr. Stockmann believes in holding his own against the mob. The banner of hard-core individualism flaps gallantly across his living room. "The majority," he knows, "is never right." And Dr. Stockmann proves this tenet to be a

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universal truth. His flinty individualism reveals that industrial pollution is social pollution. The poisoning of the town spa is the poisoning of society. Ecology is morality. He is right, right, right. Where would we be without Stockmann's philosophical truth? In Bhopal. But Dr. Stockmann also reveals himself to be a political idiot and an insufferable egomaniac. Truth is on his side, but is virtue? Yes, but.

An Enemy of the People is, in short, a decidedly good play, if not exactly a great one. And Roy Dotrice has surely given a good performance, long on Ibsen's poetry, at the Roundabout Theatre. The doctor comes off fine and ridiculous, brave and stupid, fierce and funny. Where, though, is the rest of the cast? The Roundabout has assembled some good actors, but Frank Hauser, the director, seems not to have thought the characters through. The sniveling liberals and bourgeois pigs appear to have lost their personalities as well as their souls. They lurch from scene to scene and you writhe with embarrassment at how unlifelike it all is. The actors' voices rise, the audience's hearts sink.

You might almost think, after seeing the Roundabout production, that Ibsen has turned into a hack and that the Ibsenian age is behind us. Not true! To be persuaded otherwise, go see *The Normal Heart*, by Larry Kramer, at the Public. *The Normal Heart* is *An Enemy of the People*, sort of, for 1985. The Dr. Stockmann character is a gay-rights leader named Ned Weeks and the pollution crisis is AIDS. Ned's acquaintances are dying all around him and the thought dawns that neither the gay community nor anybody else is doing much about it. The issue is purely one of public health, but as Ibsen knew, there are no matters purely of public health. Ned organizes an activist committee resembling the Gay Men's Health Crisis only to discover that petty prejudices are snipping at his heels and that his own comrades, the sniveling liberals, are quailing in fright. Should the committee mail out envelopes bearing the organization's name, which includes the word gay? Impossible: the recipients will be exposed as homosexuals. But neither can the envelopes not bear the name, because without it the post office will rescind the nonprofit postal rate. A terrible epidemic is going on, and that is the sort of problem the organization must confront.

There are also some bigger problems, beginning with Mayor Ed Koch, who is practically drawn and quartered in this play, then fed to the maggots. Larry Kramer's Koch won't do anything substantial or public in response to the epidemic—won't meet with the activist organization, won't even send an aide to meet with them until months have passed and many people have died. Why? Because no one wants to be associated with a gay cause, and perhaps because, it is suggested, Koch and his aide are gay themselves and would hate to be exposed. Is there anything to these accusations? On the details, I couldn't say; but on the main point, whether Mayor Koch deserves to be drawn and quartered, no one is likely to come away from *The Normal Heart* thinking otherwise. For New York City has a vast number of people who belong to the AIDS risk groups and its Mayor ought to have taken the lead in generating a proper public attitude throughout the country, a determination to keep cool, yet also to grapple with the disease at whatever cost and not to pretend that nothing is happening. The Mayor of New York ought to have taken charge of the epidemic, but he hasn't done so. And lest you're tempted to let him off the hook, the walls of the theater are covered with damning statistics about AIDS and government response, and drawing and quartering is the least that should happen.

Like Dr. Stockmann, Ned is meant to appear two-sided, correct in his analysis of the crisis and of the need for radical action (which he thinks ought to include a campaign against promiscuity), but also shrill, intolerant and unbearable. His own organization expells him. He begins a love affair with a timid *New York Times* reporter who comes down with the disease, and even the lover can barely stand him. Ned's prickly personality is meant to give *The Normal Heart* a normal dose of poetry in the Ibsenian sense. But there's no point talking about poetry here. Considered strictly as a play, *The Normal Heart* is a pain in the neck. Kramer's idea of dialogue is a long rant from a pamphlet on AIDS. Each character in the organization and the doctor get a turn at howling piteously at everyone for their insensitivity. I left the theater incredulous at how amateurish was the script, how wooden the directing, how stiff the actors (except for D.W.

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—*Kirkus Reviews*

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Moffett as the *Times* man), how overwrought and underimagined it all was.

Yet next day I found *The Normal Heart* was on my mind. It's not merely that it focuses attention on the epidemic and raises some political points, though that's not nothing. There's an eerie, whining, screechy tone to this play, which may be artless but is not without passion. The awful din of Kramer's voice goes in your ear, and you can't shake it loose again. Here, then, is a rare instance of an atrocious political play that succeeds in clobbering home its point. Ibsen could have done it better, but Ibsen isn't around.

A second play about AIDS, William M. Hoffman's *As Is*, recently moved from Off Broadway to the Lyceum. *As Is* shares more than a few traits with *The Normal Heart*, including a Jewish-WASP gay romance, a straight brother whose prejudices prevent him from being much help, a scene with two volunteers at the gay organization running the phone bank and keeping sane by cracking jokes. These similarities reflect a certain thinness of imagination on the part of both authors, visible especially in the Jewish-WASP tensions that are meant to fill up the space where profundity of character should be. *As Is* nevertheless manages to be quite different from *The Normal Heart* and, though less ambitious, is more successful. Clever staging conveys a good deal of what would otherwise be lecture information. Some scenes are meant to show that here is a situation affecting everyone, not just the dying man and his lover. Scenes in which the WASP gradually succumbs to his illness are played with a Greek chorus of friends and health workers looking on. Funny scenes in a leather bar show snippets of Manhattan night life. The main story, in which the WASP (Jonathan Hogan) returns to his former lover the Jew (Jonathan Hadary) to face his last days, pales next to these vivid background vignettes. The background, one might say, becomes the foreground.

There's no trumpet call to action in *As Is*, instead merely—merely!—an effort to accept impending death. The dying man is too angry to accept anything, but his lover does a lot of thinking and so do some of the health workers. The thinking is faintly religious, sans denomination, and is best expressed by the Irish nun (everyone is ethnic, shmethnic, in these AIDS plays). The nun works as a hospice nurse in Greenwich Village, where half her patients are young men. She learns something from these men and from the gay world in which she finds herself. There's a lot of joke-telling. "Did you hear about the Polish lesbian? She liked men." "The hardest thing about AIDS is convincing your parents you're Haitian." That sort of thing. The humor expresses a tight-lipped ironic love of life, a determination not to surrender joy even in the face of ghastly suffering.

The superior realism of theater over film, which Marshall Mason's directing has brought out—the recognition that real people are performing, that their dilemmas are only a few feet away, that their words are being spoken right now and to you personally, the sensation that you could touch the experience—works to powerful effect in *As Is*. You stumble out of the theater overwhelmed with sadness. Is this because the play is especially brilliant, a work for the ages? That would be too much to say. Present reality is the klieg light that makes *As Is* come to life. Someday someone will stage a revival and will discover that everything that once shook audiences up seems all too obvious. Someday *As Is* will look like a dated documentary. May that day come soon! But it is not today. □

Books Noted

New books by contributors to The Nation:

MANAGING POLITICAL CHANGE: Social Scientists and the Third World. *By Irene L. Gendzier. Westview. 238 pp. $32.50.*

RETRIEVING DEMOCRACY: In Search of Civic Equality. *By Philip Green. Rowman & Allanheld. 278 pp. $19.95.*

WITH ALL DISRESPECT. *By Calvin Trillin. Ticknor & Fields. 240 pp. $14.95.*

Forthcoming:

SOVIETICUS: American Perceptions and Soviet Realities. *By Stephen F. Cohen. Norton. 154 pp. $12.95. (June.)*

ART.

ARTHUR C. DANTO

Mistakes Of Blank (Forming Space)

It is a legend of Zen Buddhism that its founder, Bodhidharma, attained enlightenment after sustained contemplation of a blank wall. I find in this encounter a parable for addressing the recent paintings of Arakawa, on view at the Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Gallery (31 Mercer Street, New York City) until May 11. Many of the paintings have the magnitude of walls; they are vast in proportion to the viewer. They are not blank, but blankness is their subject and, in a certain sense, their substance. Enlightenment is to be achieved only through a concentrated meditation on their stubborn meanings. Bodhidharma, a favorite motif in Zen painting, can always be identified by his immense eyes: he is, in effect, a pair of enlightened eyes. In this, too, a parable may be found for our interchange with Arakawa's extraordinary works, for we leave them with a widened vision. And as the blankness of the wall required Bodhidharma to reveal its significance, Arakawa's panels require viewers if they are to be fully realized, for their truth exists in the space between them and us.

Here is an example of the sort of thing I mean. Many of the paintings include a panel with a kind of street map as its subject. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe these as diagrams of sectors of cities—Rome, Florence, Manhattan—showing streets, squares, intersections, building sites, traffic circles. They are very severely executed and, consisting only of outlines, have the look of an engineer's drawings. But as we trace out the streets, some of them undergo a subtle change. One turns into a sort of strap and begins to curve out of the map—becomes an entity with no relationship to the map and, in a sense, sharing no space with the map from which it arose. It playfully forms knots with other straps which, if we follow them back, eventually resume their identity as diagrams of streets.

Initially, the diagram lies on the surface of the panel, where diagrams belong. When the streets transform themselves into knots, the knots exist between the diagram and the surface, in an illusory space. When we trace the

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knots back to the diagrams from which they arose, the streets are once more on the surface. In brief, we are confronted by representations that are on the surfaces and not on them. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Empty and full, abstract and palpable. We are left with a set of questions about the nature of pictorial illusion. The interaction has awakened us to our perceptual assumptions. It also introduces an extreme instability in the work itself, which oscillates between two incompatible identities.

The struggle of streets to become straps is a comic allegory of the metaphysics of art. Art has always sought to escape representation and become reality. The knots mark a liberation from the surface, only to define a dimension that is also illusory. In a way, the streets have a greater claim to reality than the runaway knots, for they belong to diagrams, and diagrams are on surfaces which occupy the same space as we do. So the diagrams seek to return to the surfaces while the knots interpose themselves in such a way as to make such returns only temporary. These conflicts are only part of what is taking place—the exhibition is filled with parallel comedies—but I was eager to give you a sense of one sort of engagement between viewer and painting before describing the exhibition as a whole.

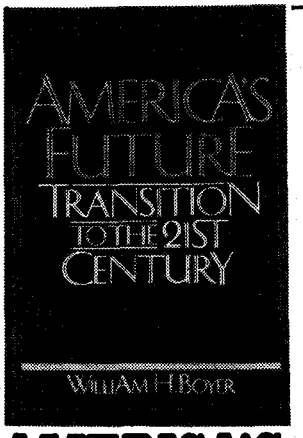
The Feldman space is divided into a north and a south gallery, the latter immense. Four paintings occupy the smaller space, eight paintings the larger one. Three paintings occupy entire walls. The largest is eleven feet high and nearly twenty-nine feet long. One's initial impression of emptiness is illusory, since every inch reflects complex artistic decisions. I recall visiting the desert in the spring and being at first disappointed by the absence of promised flowers, which of course were revealed in time, when their fragile colors released themselves to vision and the seeming blankness yielded a carpet of subtle differences. So it is with Arakawa's work, which happens to be beautiful—almost a gift to the viewer in exchange for the arduous intellectual collaboration it requires. Indeed, they have an almost edible beauty: creams and lemons and pale mochas, pistachio, rose sherbet—and then silvers, grayed whites and touches of confectionary blue. Some of the paintings have four panels with intricate relationships to one another. One of the four may be a street diagram. Within it, there may be a heavily schematized corner of a brick wall, advancing toward the viewer in an abrupt perspective, only to be driven back into the space it seeks to escape by the diagram, which affirms its unreality.

Any given painting will have an inscription, written or printed, always allusive and difficult, on the subject of the paintings of which it is a part. In some of the paintings there will be a shower of arrows; on some panels there will be pale and translucent silhouettes of familiar objects with uncertain meanings: lamps, a ladder, a light bulb, a pendulum. Some are of shapes that insist on a definition we are not quite prepared to grant. In one, a skewed optometrist's chart is slipping off the bottom edge, where it can no longer test the eye. Another consists of extraordinarily faint squares of pink.

Every work carries a title that connotes the concern with namelessness and formlessness we associate with certain oriental teachings: "Along the Way," "The Forming of Nameless," "Naming" echo Taoist themes. One of the main works has as its title the first line of a sonnet by Mallarmé, in an awkward translation. The entire exhibition has a title: Mistakes Of Blank (Forming Space). I hesitate to interpret the title, but trying to become a strap if you are a street might be an example of the kind of mistake intended.

Arakawa's work has always enlisted its viewers' participation in one way or another. One of his achievements, never completed, consists of some eighty panels, all the same size, and never, so far as I know, exhibited all at once, called "The Mechanism of Meaning." It is a work done in collaboration with his wife, the poet Madeline H. Gins, and it combines images and words. The panels are extremely witty exercises in surrealist pedagogy, somewhat in the manner of Duchamp. Each one addresses the viewer directly, giving him or her a task to perform, usually impossible, or posing a question whose unanswerability is its answer.

The panels contain instructions and imperatives one eventually recognizes as being chiefly about themselves. They reminded me of Hegel's comic masterpiece, the *Phenomenology of Mind*, since it too is about self-consciousness, but in such a way that those who read it realize that it is finally about their reading of it, that it is about *them*. A good bit of "The Mechanism of Mean-



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ing" exists in a book (Abrams, 1979), and because the relationship between painting and reproduction is exactly the sort of thing the work is about, it is possible that the book adds a dimension to the work. (Certainly the German edition does, since the paintings have to be translated.)

The more recent work is animated by questions and instructions as well, but they refer to a range of ideas narrower and more remote than those of "The Mechanism of Meaning." Arakawa is interested in "cleaving," for example, which means, in English, attachment and separation, and which condenses the sorts of tensions that are the soul of his paintings. And he is concerned with "blank," a concept I understand very little. Perhaps a clue to its meaning for him may be found in a pair of broken inscriptions that form part of the painting "Naming." On the left of the canvas, where we would begin to read, it says "ITHOUT BLANK." Then, to the right and running off the edge, it says "THERE IS NO THOUGHT W," clearly the beginning of the sentence whose ending we have already read. I suppose "blank" is described as well as displayed, since the two parts of the sentence are divided by a visible blankness on the surface of the canvas, and an invisible one behind it. At the bottom of the canvas, upside down and direction reversed, is a similar ruptured phrase: "AYS BLANK PART OF DOING IS ALW." One is obliged to think of that passage in the Tao-te ching which celebrates the powers of the void.

For all their size and intellectual energy, the new works are very quiet, and the imperatives they project are all but inaudible against the current music of the art world ringing in our ears—a charivari of cracked kettles, tom-toms and kazoos. So do not rush in as though you were a critic for *The New York Times* with a deadline for shelter. The best thing would be to come with a friend and begin a three-way conversation with the works. Take nothing for granted. Are the two panels of "The Gazing Other" halves of a single image? Then why are the colors marginally different? Why are letters dislocated when they are dislocated? Is that part of a piece of currency pasted on the right edge of a painting the other half of that piece pasted on the left? Are the arrows in the same space with the knots or on the same surface with the streets or, for all we know, in the space between the

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canvases and us? And where is the lettering?

After a time, structures begin to reveal themselves, new puzzles emerge. Part of the meaning must reside in the irresolvability of interpretations. If you cannot return for a second look, there is to be a show of drawings, answering to the same impulses, at the Arnold Herstand and Company Gallery (24 West 57th Street) until June 15.

Arakawa is one of the few masters in the art world, where the category of the master has been forgotten and most people think of disclipline as one of the kinkier outposts of sex. □

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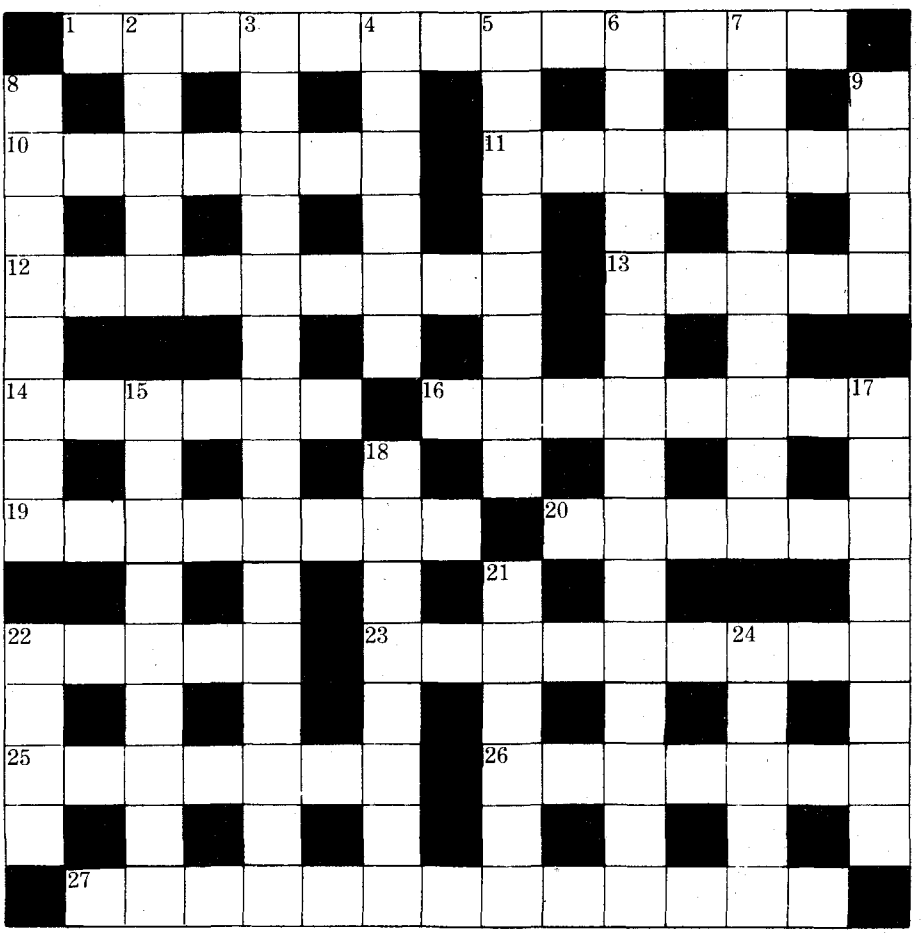

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1 What department heads hold at Peabody and Juilliard could be child's play. (7,6)
10 What one of our first astronauts took for us at the dance? (3,4)
11 Indian making a hit with a calling of old. (7)
12 People that take the pledge eventually? (In the past, did they think twice about it?) (9)
13 Yours might be old before me in good season. (5)
14 Something like the last one at New Orleans called off? How dishonest! (2,4)
16 The name for one of our old criminals didn't imply he was a muffler expert. (8)
19 Loss of consciousness perhaps called for in wartime? (8)
20 Produced by some agency. (6)
22 Such as Ferrer certainly doesn't go soft—he takes one of the Emperor's names. (5)
23 An arm on the bed has some weight—things might go off because of it. (9)
25 Sort of lies on a rock near the Pacific coast as his habitat, perhaps. (3,4)
26 Upset, angered? Throw things into disorder! (7)
27 The thing that sometimes keeps a round from being flat? (13)

DOWN

2 Turn over and add something on, by the sound of it. (2-3)
3 I think of cement, I find, as barely on hand. (2,3,4,2,4)
4 A very soft top on the French fruit. (6)
5 War horses, as they say—particularly the products of Greece and Rome. (8)
6 Golf may be simply this—or the soup—or your navigation! (1,6,2,6)
7 One might be at the count of three. (Your suit might be otherwise.) (5-4)
8 Turned at the entrance, perhaps. (8)
9 Done badly, it might be in the same shape as 8. (4)
15 Advisers to the Admiral in Arizona? (9)
17 If you're over this, you might get another attack. (9)
18 The novelist is opening up, but has internal drive. (8)
21 Poles, like around 9? Positively! (6)
22 Only fair! (4)
24 Medicine of note. (5)

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